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Regulating Transgressions/ Transgressing Regulations:

Graffiti, Street Art And Muralism In Bogotá, Colombia

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Regulating Transgressions/ Transgressing Regulations: Graffiti, Street Art And Muralism In Bogotá, Colombia

by

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Dedication

I want to dedicate my thesis to my niece Lucía Ortiz Vargas, who I am sure with the love of her family will overcome all the challenges ahead of her life. I will make sure to be there by your side as you grow and that as soon as you can understand these lines I will give you a copy of this work.

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enseñarme qué significa ser un hombre feminista y simplemente por ser como eres conmigo. I hope our journey continues for a long time and takes us to new places.

Abstract

Regulating Transgressions/ Transgressing Regulations: Graffiti, Street Art And Muralism In Bogotá, Colombia

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Abstract: This thesis attempts to capture the complexities of the urban art scene in Bogotá, Colombia. From 2011 to 2015, Gustavo Petro, the major of Bogotá, implemented Decreto 75, a decree that broke with the usual repressive approach towards street art and instead encouraged the production of "responsible and artistic graffiti". By critically assessing the scope and breadth of this innovative legal framework, this thesis shows the inherent contradictions stemming from any attempt to regulate a transgression. This analysis is based on a review of official documents published by the Secretaría de Cultura, Recreación y Deporte (Bogotá's Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Sport) and the Instituto Distrital de las Artes (Bogotá's Art Institute), as well as an interview with a city official who was instrumental in drafting Decreto 75. The study also draws on ethnographic methods and 20 semi-structured interviews with graffiti writers, street artists, and muralists to document their lived experience and critically assess how they responded to this new legal framework. In doing so, this thesis shows how even flexible regulations will be transgressed. This study contributes to research on the politics of urban art and provides important insights for urban planners who seek to understand the important role of street art in the social production of public spaces.

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Introduction: On Street Jargon, Visual Glossary and Positionality

"VEINTICUATRO HORAS DE GRAFFITI"

In November 2013 an unprecedented event took place in Bogotá, Colombia. More than 200 hundred graffiti writers collectively painted an underpass of the *calle 26*, a major arterial in the city, in the middle of the day. This rebellious act was triggered by two different circumstances: in August 2011 Diego Felipe Becerra, a teenage graffiti writer, was gunned down by a policeman when he attempted to write a graffiti (Revista Semana, 2011); two years later the general public was shocked when they learnt that the police protected an international pop singer whilst he painted a wall in Bogotá (Caracol Radio, 2013). Outraged by the difference in the way the police treated these two adolescents, La Familia Ayara, an organization that uses hip-hop culture as a pedagogical tool for the wellbeing of young and vulnerable Bogotanos, launched a protest through their Facebook website with this message:

> "Vamos a tomarnos el puente de la calle 26. *Veinticuatro horas de graffiti* por nuestro derecho a la ciudad, por la libertad y el derecho a la vida" (Don Popo, 2013, emphasis in the original)

Jeyffer Rentería, founder of La Familia Ayara and signing as Don Popo, included this message in an article he wrote for *El Espectador,* one of the two mainstream newspapers in Colombia. In it Rentería narrates how the policemen merely watched the graffiti writers, having been ordered to stand down by Gustavo Petro, the mayor of Bogotá. To ease the misgivings of the graffiti artists Don Popo showed them a *Whatsapp* (an instant messaging platform widely used in Latin America) conversation with Aldo

Civico, a Rutgers professor and cofounder of The International Institute for Peace, who Rentería calls their "political strategist". But equally as important were the messages of support that people all over the world posted on Facebook and Twitter. This multifaceted network sustained the graffiti writers as they sprayed the grey walls of a key intersection in this highly symbolical avenue in Bogotá: the calle 26 houses the National University, the Museum of Modern Art, what remains of the Central Cemetery, and the headquarters of *El Tiempo,* the other mainstream newspaper in Colombia. In the picture accompanying the article one can see the exclusive lane for Transmilenio, one of the most successful Bus Rapid Transit systems in Latin America, which runs down this street towards El Dorado International Airport.

The "taking" of the calle 26 is still more perplexing due to the fact that Bogotá had at the time of the event a rather progressive legal framework for graffiti. The *Decreto 75 de 2013* (Decree 75) promotes the "responsible and artistic practice of graffiti in the city". Following a process called *Mesa Distrital del Graffiti* (Graffiti District Board, MDG henceforward) that began in June 2012, both city officials and certain graffiti writers managed to reach an agreement that was codified into this law. Despite this inclusive process the Decreto 75 still heavily regulates graffiti and forbids writers from working on the surfaces of the road system, which includes bridges, tunnels and underpasses. As a matter of fact, in the middle of a complex process where left-winged Petro was temporarily impeached, one of the first actions of the incumbent mayor, appointed by the President, was to erase certain graffiti from the calle 26. Only the pieces done by "five collectives of experts in urban art" were left untouched (El Tiempo, 2014).

In other words, the policemen effectively sanctioned what they considered "artistic" graffiti over "irresponsible" graffiti. Predictably enough the graffiti writers and street artists promptly returned to reclaim this space and paint over the grey gruel that policemen had applied on the surfaces of the calle 26's underpass.

This event sparked my interest in this subject and ultimately led me to write my thesis on street art and graffiti in Bogotá. It gave me the opportunity to revisit the city where I grew up and explore it from a different perspective, a profoundly pedestrian one. During three months (June to August, 2015) I became part of an urban art collective known as *Lavamoatumbá*. There I met different street artists and graffiti writers who brought me with them to explore the streets of Bogotá and who showed me the "scene" from within. I realized something unique was happening in my hometown: something that could broaden the scholarly understanding of this cultural practice. This is a phenomenon that is global in scale but at the same time bounded to an urban geography; that is, few major cities in the world do not have some kind of street art or graffiti on its walls. And yet, almost all the scholars writing in English base their findings and analysis on European, North American or Australian cities. Therefore, I am not only examining an understudied city but also expanding, and sometimes challenging, the way U.S and European scholars have tried to understand urban art.

To accomplish this, I will first show how I went about studying an urban cultural phenomenon as highly contested as graffiti and street art. In Chapter 1 I will present my theoretical framework and clarify my understanding of concepts such as public space, transgression, tactics and strategies, all of which are crucial to understanding urban art.

Furthermore, in this chapter I discuss the strengths and limitations of my ethnographic approach. While I had limited time in the field, I triangulated my findings with different sources of information, including 20 interviews I conducted at the end of my fieldwork. In my interviews, I asked artists and writers about their personal stories and artistic careers, but more importantly, what they thought about Bogotá's new regulations on urban art and their opinions about the events that transpired on *La Avenida del Dorado* (the 26th Street). These interviews are my main source of data, but I complement the interviews with photos I took during my fieldwork and social media posts by other street artists and graffiti writers. This way I seek to provide sufficient evidence to support what would otherwise be purely theoretical claims.

In Chapter 2, I review the existing literature on street art and graffiti. My intention is first to show that the Eurocentric perspective of most U.S and European scholars tend to overemphasize the social constructions of "illegality" surrounding this cultural practice. Yet, in cities such as Bogotá or Sao Paulo where there is widespread urban art, the issue of illegality loses its importance. This is not to say that graffiti and street art is not illegal in these cities but rather that there are other mechanisms of control which in turn elicit different forms of resistance from graffiti writers and street artists. In this chapter I enter into dialogue with Latin-American scholars who have analyzed this highly complex cultural phenomenon. I believe scholars from the "global north" who study street art and graffiti can gain new insights by reading thinkers who normally do not write in English, such as Armando Silva or Néstor García Canclini.

After completing my fieldwork I realized that the existing literature on street art

and graffiti could not easily explain Bogotá's progressive legal framework, let alone the protest launched by Don Popo. On the one hand, the city administration was attempting to implement a new approach towards street art and graffiti. Police officers no longer harassed graffiti writers or street artists, and different governmental entities provided support (both economic and institutional) to encourage what they construed as "better" urban art. This effort I have called "regulating transgressions" and will be the main focus of chapter 3 where, drawing on concepts developed by de Certeau (2011), I hope to show the "strategies" deployed by Petro's administration to control urban art. I seek to support my claims with two sources of evidence. The first is an interview I conducted with a member of the *Secretaría de Cultura, Recreación y Deporte* (Bogotá's Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Sport, or SCRD for short) who played an active role in the creation of the Decreto 75, which promotes "artistic and responsible graffiti." The second source of evidence is a booklet that was distributed by (Bogotá's Art Institute, IDARTES henceforward) that showcases the "best of" Bogotá's urban art. Through an analysis of the images in this booklet, I argue that the city government promotes an urban art that is legible, i.e. forms of art that the general public can easily understand or appreciate it as opposed to the "illegible" scribbles that can only be deciphered by graffiti writers and street artists.

Graffiti writers and street artists reacted in various ways to this new legal framework. Some street artists took advantage of the opportunities the government was giving them, other graffiti writers decided not to participate in the *convocatorias*, and yet

others criticized this new legal framework, alleging that graffiti was an inherently illegal practice. That is to say, again drawing on de Certeau (2011), graffiti writers and street artists developed "tactics" of their own in response to the state's strategies. These tactics, which I here refer to as "transgressing regulations," are the main subject of Chapter 4. Here is where I draw extensively from the interviews I conducted in Bogotá and where I hope to show the nuances of street art and graffiti writing in a Latin American context, both in terms of diversity of creative expression but also in terms of its multifaceted political dimensions. Street art and graffiti are ubiquitous urban phenomena and yet almost all city governments attempt to "deal" with them in the same old way. This work, then, explores a novel approach towards urban art and also shows how street artists and graffiti writers can teach us to think of and construct public space differently. However, before I embark on this exploration of urban art in Bogotá and all its policy and theoretical implications I will first clarify key terms that I will use throughout this work.

ON MURALS, PIECES, TAGS AND STREET JARGON

How do you make sense of a "bombed away city"? (See Image 1.1) Stencils, tags, pieces, wild-style, throw-ups, and even state-sponsored murals all decorate or desecrate (depending on who you ask) the walls of almost all major streets in Bogotá and are the defining features of the *Avenida del Dorado*. For some, these letters and images do not say anything and are just violating private property. Others feel bewildered by them: as a matter of fact the terms that I just used might disorient readers already. Yet, for those who can read its code it becomes more than art: it becomes a way of being in the city.

In order to productively explore the diversity of Bogotá street art and graffiti scene it is crucial to define the terms with which I began this introduction. Otherwise, readers that are not familiar with graffiti and street art will soon get lost. But before that, a word of caution: confronted by the complex nature of these cultural expressions, almost all social scientists who study this phenomenon present readers with a typology of the different forms of street expressions, while at the same time recognizing the limited validity of their own categorization. Perhaps Alison Young best put it when she wrote:

> *"[S]treet art is sometimes regarded as a youth activity; at other times, as an evolution of graffiti, or a subculture, or a variant of artistic practice. Sometimes it is claimed to be a wholly new art form or new art movement. It is also regarded as transgressive behaviour. It has been analyzed as a communicative practice capable of fostering new ways of being in public space; as a political practice; as akin to advertising; and as an aspect of urban space. Can something really be all of these things at once? Is the problem one of definition?"* (Young, 2014, p. 8)

In a sense, when one studies a phenomenon that is intersected by so many layers (its legal status, its aesthetic value, its transgressive nature, its anonymous creation, etc.) any sort of theoretical construct seems insufficient to truly "capture" it. That is, the slippery definition of graffiti and street art brings to the fore the fact that any theoretical model (or in fact any definition) of a social "problem" is in itself a social construct. The categorization, therefore, that I am about to present should not be taken too literally. The definitions of what is and what is not graffiti are highly debated within the street scene, and the people who I interviewed in Bogotá will most likely contest my

categorization here. Yet, one of the first things that my immersion in the field allowed me to understand is that there are three distinct categories: *graffiti*, *street art* and *muralism*. In very simplistic terms, graffiti is done without permission and is always done illegally. Within this category there are tags (or the quick signatures of writers) (See Image 1.2), stickers, paste-ups (See Image 1.3), and *bombas* or throw-ups (larger versions of tags) (See Image 1.4). Street art exists uneasily in-between graffiti and muralism. It is still transgressive but it might be more easily coopted by the art market. It includes techniques such as stencils (See Image 1.5) that may be use for large murals or just to replicate the same image over and over (just like a tagger would put his name all over town). *Pieces* (short for masterpiece) are the culminating work of a graffiti writer, and typically include highly stylized letters (See Image 1.6). This lettering often follows certain aesthetic forms, the most famous being *wild-style*: three-dimensional letters that are hard to decipher to non-graffiti writers (See Image 1.7). I include all these categories of writing within street art, since only accomplished graffiti writers are capable of producing such work, and you actually see wild-style and other pieces in art galleries (as opposed to throw-ups and tags that are almost exclusively located on the streets). In order to emphasize this distinction, throughout this work I will use both the terms graffiti writer and street artist.

Muralism, meanwhile, lies at the other end of the spectrum (See Image 1.8). It is always done on "legal" walls, which either means that the artist has permission from the owner of the building or that she is doing a wall sponsored by a governmental agency. The latter type of murals is paid for by state agencies and consequently its messages tend

to align with liberal and left-wing messages.[1] Here it is important to note that this categorization does not translate directly onto the artists themselves because their identities are far more flexible. For example, they might work for a week on a mural paid for by a local *alcaldía* (mayoralty) just to use the left-over paint to do an illegal throw-up the following night. Finally, whenever I use the term "urban art scene" I mean to include graffiti writing, street art and muralism.

VISUAL GLOSSARY:

In this section I will illustrate with my own pictures many the terms that I will use throughout this thesis. Like I said before readers should not assume this categorization is exhaustive; however it is necessary that they become acquainted with some of the street jargon for them to follow my own analysis. Except where otherwise noted, all of the following pictures were taken in the 26th Street. Apart from the first photograph, all the other images follow a trajectory from the clearly illegal (i.e. *tags* and *throw-ups*) to the explicitly legal and state-sponsored murals.

[1] Bogotanas/os typically vote for progressive mayors and thus its murals have messages promoting the use of bikes, or against bullfighting campaigns, or support for the ongoing peace agreements in la Havana, Cuba and so forth.

Image 1.1: Following Morrison (2014), I believe Bogotá should be considered a "saturated city" because murals, street art and graffiti are an integral part of its cityscape. The mural *El Beso* (The Kiss) was done by Vertigo Graffiti.

Image 1.2: A *tag* is a quick but stylized signature that writers normally do with spray cans or marker in a color that contrast with its background. They tend to stay the same, allowing other practitioners to know where a particular writer has been.

Image 1.3: Paste-ups are larger versions of stickers since they are drawings done on different kinds of papers, just like the fox and the man above, and then attached to a wall using wheat-paste or other form of glue. (Image taken in the Zona T)

Image 1.4: Throw-ups or *bombas* as they are known in Bogotá are bigger versions of tags; experienced writers may accomplish them in a couple of minutes.

Image 1.5: Stencils tend to be made of cardboard or other media and therefore can be highly reproducible. However, street artists like Stinkfish have developed fairly complex stencils just like this one of a boy (*Zas* did the *APC* lettering above).

Image 1.6: Pieces (short for “masterpiece”) is the largest form of graffiti. They normally are created by groups of graffiti writers that use the names of their crew (in this case KAVS and SAVS). They may include other visual components or pop culture references (such as the lizard in the bottom left corner).

Image 1.7: *Gris* created part of this wild-style piece where the "graphs" or letters are so complex that they are almost impossible to read. Since these works take several hours to finish they are rarely undertaken without the permission of the city government or the "owner" of the wall. (Image taken in Barrio *Las Cruces*)

Image 1.8: Toxicómano did this stencil for a mural on the Calle 26. For large-scale works, such as this one, he normally works with Lesivo, Dj Lu and Guache, the four of whom created the collective Bogotá Street Art.

POSITIONALITY:

Even though I am very sympathetic towards most graffiti writers and street artists, I still have a critical stance towards their actions. After my time in the field I learned to appreciate the value in throw-ups and tags, which are normally seen as acts of vandalism. Yet, I can also see how these unsanctioned forms of art can be nuisances for building owners, who want their properties to look "clean" and who spend quite a lot of money to paint over or buff these mysterious scribbles. Having said this, I still believe the actions of graffiti writers and street artists force us to challenge our notions of what constitutes

public space, what truly is private property, and what can be considered art. More importantly, now that I have started to understand the different codes behind street art and graffiti, I find myself more aware of the urban setting that used to be just a mere background and I have come to enjoy all forms of urban art. Whenever I move within urban space, whether in public transit, walking or in a private car, I actively look for tags, *bombas* or pieces. I truly believe street art and graffiti writing has helped me understand that public spaces can be constructed in different ways and that we do not have to take for granted the urban setting in which we live.

Another important point is that I did not personally experience most of the events that I describe and analyze here, since I was living and studying in Austin, Texas. I see this as an advantage rather than a shortcoming. This distance allows me to examine Bogota's urban art scene without romanticizing it or unfairly critiquing a municipal administration that has sought creative, new ways to approach graffiti and street art. Ultimately, I seek to explore this complex social phenomenon from different perspectives in order to understand how the Colombian State regulates transgressions—but also how graffiti writers and street artists transgress these regulations.

Chapter 1: Theory, Methods and Historical Background

STUDYING A SUBALTERN CULTURAL PRACTICE.

Let me start by asking a big question: how do you study culture? Furthermore, how do you study an *urban* cultural phenomenon as highly contested as graffiti and street art? In the *Introduction of Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, James Clifford argues that:

> If "culture" is not an object to be described, neither is it a unified corpus of symbols and meanings that can definitely be interpreted. Culture is contested, temporal, and emergent. Representation and explanation – both by insiders and outsiders- is implicated in this emergence (Clifford, 1986, p. 19)

Urban art highlights the contested nature of cultural practices since interpretations of it abound. There is a proliferation of both outsiders' analysis and insider's perspectives. State agencies produce special reports analyzing the phenomenon; criminologists argue that it is a youth practice while some historians argue it is a practice as old as the first cave paintings; some laws criminalize the practice while others regulate them; movies romanticize this urban cultural practice; anthropologists use it as an example of transgression and radical geographers see it as fostering new ways of appropriating public space. At the same time, artists and writers[2] and other insiders have published self-financed books that showcase their art; documentaries have inspired other

[2] Following Stewart (1994) I will use the term "graffiti writers" because this heterogeneous group of people call themselves writers, e.g they do graphs. In this prospectus I will also use the term "grafiteras/os" because it capture the ambiguous nature of graffiti: both the artistic and illegal nature of this activity as well to challenge the gendered assumptions that surround this practice. However, whenever I quote from some else, either from interviews, magazine articles, blog posts, I will use the exact words the author or interviewee used.

people to *hit* their cities; activists have written newspaper articles to argue that street art is more than artistic expression; and there are innumerable online discussions (in blogs, Facebook posts, and other social media platforms) that constantly problematize the definition of graffiti and street. Thus, insiders are also actively engaged in the debates that surround this cultural expression. During my fieldwork, and without me prompting it, (more than once with a beer in hand) I had informal but highly "theoretical" discussions of what "graffiti" is and what it is not and how it differs from "street art." Sometimes the arguments get heated because these categories have real impacts on people's lives: a legal definition of what constitutes "artistic graffiti" may very easily send a tagger to jail for a night. They also tend to be reflective of their own practice because other artists and writers will question their "street credit": if a graffiti writer only works for state-sponsored murals she will be called a sell-out, and consequently no longer a true *grafitera/o*.

When one studies a phenomenon that has been analyzed through so many lenses and is constantly being debated it becomes very difficult to truly "capture" it. That is, the slippery definition of graffiti and street art brings to the fore the fact that any theoretical model (or in fact any definition) of a social "problem" is in itself a social construct. This is not to say that all interpretations are equally valid. To this day, the Wilson and Kelling "Broken Window" (1982) study is still used as a theory to support anti-graffiti laws and regulations. Most scholars who study graffiti have criticized this article. A scholar even wrote an entire book to prove that this "theory" is no more than a hypothesis with no empirical evidence, and that the control mechanisms suggested in it are not even effective

in combating crime (Harcourt, 2009). If knowledge is power then it is paramount to have an evidence-based method to support our scientific assertions. Otherwise we might reproduce social power differentials with our research. Or, as Sarah Dooling used to remind us over and over again in her Research Methods class, "no science is better that bad science".

For this reason, in this section I will try to map both the bodies of literature that underpin my understanding of this slippery cultural phenomena as well as the research methods I deployed to document it. My aim here is not to solve the question of how to study culture but rather how I went about studying and understanding a cultural phenomenon that fascinates me. Similarly, I do not claim to be objective. My purpose, rather, is to be as transparent as possible by revealing the theoretical assumptions and methodological limits of my own research. Readers that are not interested in purely theoretical debates might as well jump to the next chapter where I will assess the literature that deals specifically with graffiti and street art.

AN UNUSUAL STARTING POINT: REFLEXIVITY.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is perhaps best known for his concepts of habitus, fields and symbolic capital but one of his most overlooked notions is that of reflexivity (See Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). According to Bourdieu, social scientists need to reflect on the position from where they produce knowledge in order to provide an analysis that does not reproduce the unquestioned beliefs, or *doxas*, in any (academic) field. This is deceptively trite, since Bourdieu argues that this reflexive exercise is

necessary not only on moral grounds but perhaps more importantly for analytical reasons: "Whatever his scientific pretension may be, objectification [carried out by a social scientist] is doomed to remain partial, and thus false, for as long as it ignores or refuses to see the viewpoint from which it is stated, and thus view the game as a whole" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 184). Applying this logic to my own research, I take this to mean that in order to understand the complexities of the urban art scene in Bogotá it is crucial to first examine my own position as a student in a prestigious public university in the United States.

In an interview with Loic Wacquant, Bourdieu states that the:

> …objectivization of any cultural producer involves more than pointing to – and bemoaning – his class background and location, his race or his gender. We must not forget to objectivize his position in the universe of cultural production, in this case the scientific or academic field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 33)

Although I do not agree with everything Bourdieu says in this statement let me first clarify my position in the academic field. During my time in Austin I studied Latin American Studies (LAS) and Community and Regional Planning (CRP). The first is multidisciplinary whereas the second emerges from a tradition of urban planning practice and theory. For this reason CRP has a canon, however contested it may be, whereas in LAS the notion of a canon is in itself highly questioned. LAS provides students with a Master of Arts which means that qualitative methods tend to prevail, whereas CRP leads to a Master of Science where quantitative methods are preferred. Therefore, my own account has to respond to both these scholarly traditions by being critical but also empirically grounded.

My intended audience within this dual academic context have certain expectations of my account of street art and graffiti: that it be "objective", that it fills a gap in the literature, that it is theoretically sound and empirically grounded. But these expectations sometimes clash with the reality I was experiencing when gathering information on the booming urban art scene in my hometown of Bogotá. Most professors I talked with about my project encouraged me to come up with some sort of classification of the different forms of urban art in Bogotá. However, a lot of the street artists and graffiti writers I spoke to were mistrustful of any sort of rigid classifications. Some of them call themselves *grafiteras/os* although, for me, they are more like street artists. Others say they are muralists and yet they began doing illegal pieces, what in my mind was more akin to graffiti. Soon, I realized that my categories should only be applied to the urban art itself and not to the artists because their identities are far more fluid that what classification schemes seem to imply.

Perhaps one of the biggest limitations of Bourdieu's theory, one that belies his own call for a reflexive sociology, is his unapologetically Eurocentric stance. Here I think is important to consider how scholars in subaltern studies have critiqued and consequently re-conceptualized the relationship between researchers and the people we study. Veena Das argues along with Gayatari Spivek that: "to deny that we write as people whose consciousness has been formed as colonial subjects is to deny our history" (Das, 1989, p. 310). One way to challenge while recognizing this colonial history is to reveal the limitations of scholarly work on graffiti and street art the mainly focuses on European and U.S. cities (see Chapter 2). Another way to engage this cultural phenomena in an

appropriate way is to conceptualize my own research as "studying with subaltern social groups" rather than "studying the subaltern" (Mato, 2000). Daniel Mato makes no concessions when he calls for a different form of scholarly work:

> It is ethically, politically, and epistemologically imperative that researchers find ways to promote the conscious incorporation of social groups that are usually targeted as subjects of study into jointly conceived research agendas (See Mato, 2000, p. 481).

Therefore, I strived to study *along with* different graffiti writers and street artists with the dual goal of enriching the existing debates that surround this cultural phenomenon in Bogotá and to show scholars and planners of different latitudes the benefits and limitations of a more lenient posture towards urban art.

As a subaltern social group, graffiti writers and street artists can easily be considered a "political" society as opposed to a "civil" society. Following Chatterjee, the latter is a restricted section of culturally equipped citizens protected by all the nation's laws and regulations whereas the former is a *population* that needs to be controlled and looked after by different governmental agencies (Chatterjee, 2006, pp. 38–41). This author is mainly concerned with squatter settlements in India but his description of political society could readily be applied to the graffiti writers and street artists in Bogotá: *"These groups on their part accept that their activities are often illegal and contrary to good civic behavior, but they make a claim to a habitation and a livelihood as a matter of right"* (Chatterjee, 2006, p. 40). Obviously the graffiti writers and street artists' claim is not one of habitation but rather of freedom of expression, while their site of struggle is

"public space." For this reason it is crucial to delve into some of the complexities of this concept.

PUBLIC SPACE/SPHERE AS A SITE OF CONTESTATION

To me, public space is more than a physical location: it is socially produced (Lefebvre, 1992) and therefore a site of constant social contestation (Mitchell, 2003). Urban art is a particularly complex spatial and cultural phenomenon precisely because it situated in the midst of the dialectic between the social production of space and the social construction of space (Low, 2010, pp. 127 – 129). That is, public space is produced by economic, political and social processes, but at the same time it is actively constructed by social actors that operate within, and in occasions, against it. Graffiti writers and street artists are social actors in Bogotá that are transforming the public space that shapes their daily experiences. However, their re-construction of space has been incorporated in the social production of space through legislation like the Decreto 75, which "promotes the artistic and responsible practice of graffiti". This regulation, therefore, seeks to incorporate a transgressive practice (See Cresswell, 1996) into a hegemonic space, or what Young refers to as the "regulated city" (Young, 2014).

It is also important to note that public space exists through what Habermas calls the public sphere (Habermas, 1991). That is, public space not only exists in the material world in the form of a park, for example, but public space also circulates in the public sphere. The public sphere, in turn, reflects the opinions of civil society, which at different times values the existence of some public spaces over others. Or, to give a concrete

example, certain actors within the public sphere may try to exclude some people from using a given public spaces, as Mitchell shows in his study of homelessness and People's Park in Berkeley, California (Mitchell, 2003). Setha Low and Neil Smith (2005) remind us that "public space comes about as a specific expression of civil society but does not remain contained within it; rather it emerges according to Habermas' account of the public sphere, "between civil society and the state" (Low and Smith, 2005, p. 4). This becomes evident when a cultural practice disrupts and alters public space, such as the emergence of urban art on a wall in Bogotá's: all of a sudden there are newspaper articles and television shows that comment on the city's urban art scene, usually portraying it as a form of disorder that needs to be eradicated or at least contained. On the other hand, graffiti writers and street artists work as a "counter-public" (Warner, 2002) in the sense that their actions profoundly challenge this view. They disregard the notion of private property and question the presumed privilege of state actors to produce and modify public spaces, and they do this not only on the physical walls of Bogotá but also in the public sphere: they too write newspaper articles, appear on television defending their art, and use different social media platforms - i.e. Facebook, Youtube, Instagram - to voice their opinions. As an example, I could point out how graffiti writers and street artists are taking advantage to Bogota's popularity as a tourist attraction within the public sphere (See Lonely Planet's article (Matt, 2016) for an example). Some practioners, especially those that can speak English, are promoting their own city tours, which cater exclusively to international audiences. There success can be attested in that that even a New York Times article titled *36 Hours in Bogotá* (Wulfhart, 2015) recommends one of them.

However, precisely because of their popularity some graffiti writers and artists are now being accused of gentrifying certain neighborhoods, which forces them to defend their work by showing how they work alongside the community to create a given mural or piece.

IS STREET ART AND GRAFFITI A TRANSGRESSION?

It is important to ask if and when graffiti and street constitute transgressions. Stewart (1994), for example, investigates the intersection between writing and crime, exploring how "graffiti writers" use the mechanisms of marketing but profoundly subvert its meaning. For this author this is ultimately the reason graffiti becomes a crime: it is advertisement that sells nothing other than the anonymous identity of its authors. Similarly Cresswell (1996) asks for the "crucial where of graffiti" to make an argument about transgression. For this author, graffiti loses its transgressive nature as soon as it is placed within an art gallery. Cresswell defines transgression as an act judged to have crossed a line that it was not supposed to cross; furthermore, he contrast transgression with an act of resistance because the former is "judged by those who react to it, while resistance rests on the intention of the actor(s)" (Cresswell, 1996, p. 23). Although both Stewart and Cresswell are referring to graffiti, their insights can still be applied to street art since this cultural expression questions the advertising industry and use the city as their canvas.

A useful albeit abstract concept to understand graffiti and street art is De Certeau's "tactics," which he defines in contradictor to the concept of "strategies." He defines strategies as:

> … the calculus of a force-relationship which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an "environment… Political, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model (de Certeau, 2011, p. xix)

In this sense urban planning deploys specific strategies to create a clean and safe environment. On the other hand, a tactic is:

> … a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of the tactic belongs to the other… The "proper" is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place a tactic depends on time – it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized "on the wing". Whatever it wins, it does not keep (de Certeau, 2011, p. xix)

I extensively quote from de Certeau because his definition of tactics poetically captures the essence of graffiti and street art. These urban cultural expressions do not have a proper place: indeed as Creswell remind us they are a transgression precisely because they are out of place.

From De Certeau's perspective, Bogotá's legal framework can be considered a strategy to regulate street art but at the same time, this strategy sought to challenge the received wisdom to erase and eradicate street art and graffiti at all costs. Through the

Decreto 75, the administration of Gustavo Petro (2010-2014) developed a communicative approach in order to engage in dialogue with different street artists and graffiti writers. In this way the municipal administration through its Decreto 75 sought to promote a "responsible and artistic graffiti," thus perhaps incorporate a "tactic" within a strategy: to allow street artists and graffiti writers a sanctioned place to work. However, this enterprise is fraught with contradictions and my intention is to highlight some of these. But before I do so let me first explain the methods I used to gather my data.

METHODS: A HESITANT ETHNOGRAPHY

Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that in order to understand the interactions between power, rationality, and the urban environment, single case-study research is essential. In this particular case, I believe the rationality that governs these cultural producers is reflected the Decreto 75 and made operational through its attendant participative process, *Mesa Distrital del Graffiti*. These legal and bureaucratic processes are designed specifically to regulate the actions of certain cultural producers in the urban environment, or to be more precise, in the public space. Therefore the only sensible way to understand and consequently show these interactions was to conduct participant observations with graffiti writers and street artists.

Another important reason for case study research is the fact that the urban art scene constitutes a form of what Holston (1999) dubs insurgent citizenship. Holston suggests that the dominant contemporary urban experience is one of heterogeneity. Urban scholars therefore need to incorporate all the practices that work against the absorption of

these forms of insurgent citizenships into the modern state (Holston, 1999, p. 171). This has methodological implications, since he argues that urban scholars first need to understand the social processes that underlie a specific locality and engage with the different forms of insurgent citizenship; i.e. "to begin from an ethnographic conception of the social and its spaces of insurgent citizenship" (Holston, 1999, p. 174). For reasons I will explain later on, I will limit the scope of my work to one specific street in Bogotá. Furthermore, I will only analyze events that occurred between 2010-2014 when Gustavo Petro was mayor of Bogotá because it was in his *alcaldía* (administration) where a different strategy (in De Certeau's sense) was tried out to deal with graffiti and street art. However, I hesitate to call this project an ethnography in part because I did not spend the required amount of time in the "field". The best ethnographies I have read were written after at least a year of fieldwork (Auyero & Berti, 2015; Desmond, 2008; Low, 2010; L. J. D. Wacquant, 2004). Besides, I am not trained as an ethnographer and have only grazed the vast literature on this methodology. Having recognized this limitation, this work is profoundly informed by an ethnographic sensibility since I strived to immerse myself in Bogotá's booming urban art scene. And throughout this thesis I will seek to "ethnographically show" rather than theoretically tell some of the contradictions of "promoting the responsible and artistic practice of graffiti" as the Decreto 75 states.

I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork from July to August 2015, when I had the opportunity to witness the urban art scene in Bogotá from within. I assisted with events related to graffiti and street art, including individual artist's shows in galleries devoted exclusively to street art, launches of sticker books, and live-painting sessions in parking

lots to tagging competitions. I regularly meandered through the city taking pictures (I collected over 2,000 photos) and sometimes ran into people doing large pieces and informally interviewed them. I participated with friends in the creation of a mural for a public market and may have done a couple of tags myself. Furthermore, I also participated in a session of the Mesa Distrital del Graffiti (MSG), where I witnessed how city officials discuss different issues with street artist or graffiti writers who want to participate in this participatory process. Lastly, I interviewed a lawyer who played an active role in the development of the Decreto 75, and Jeyffer Renetería, a.k.a. Don Popo, who is an Afro-Colombian activist and a strong proponent of hip-hop with graffiti as a pedagogical tool.

However, the most important aspect of my fieldwork was my active involvement in a project dubbed "Lavamoatumbá."[3] The premise of this artistic project was to intervene in houses that would eventually be demolished; in the first such intervention over 70 *grafiteras/os* and street artists worked together, whereas in the second event, 120 artists (including me) painted the walls of an abandoned house that for 30 years had served as the first Chinese restaurant in the city. During my time spent in this space, I had the opportunity to learn how to use a can of spray, how to properly use scissors in order to cut stickers, and how to create a stencil from scratch from some of the most recognized street artists and graffiti writers in Bogotá. In that space of collective creation, my vision of these cultural phenomena was profoundly altered and in turn allowed me to understand

[3] There is an excellent series of videos that manage to capture the essence of the project. The second chapter documents different artists intervening different parts of the house. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gNq78dGpus

some of the unspoken rules that govern them. My time spent in Lavamoatumbá also allowed me to conduct semi-structured interviews with more than 20 street artists and graffiti writers, almost all of whom participated in this event.

Although this event profoundly shaped my views on the issues that I will analyze later on, I will not directly discuss this event because the artists and writers I met there became true friends. Let me quote Rigoberta Menchú to express what I feel:

> I'm still keeping secret what I think no-one should know. Not even anthropologists or intellectuals, no matter how many books they have, can find out all our secrets (Menchú, 2009, p. 289).

Whereas I do not claim to have become one of "them", the fact remains that I did participate in this event and I shared many secrets with the inhabitants of this space, secrets that I do not want to divulge or analyze. In fact, one of the organizers, surely out of kindness, kept correcting me each time I did not include myself within the artists of Lavamoatumbá. Having said this, it would be intellectually dishonest to not recognize their input, since most of my insights derived directly from the many discussions we shared. It is for this reason that they are mentioned only in my section on methodology, but not throughout the thesis.

Instead, my study will analyze Calle 26. Why this street? First, because it is one of the major avenues in Bogotá, connecting the El Dorado International Airport to the rest of the city. Second, it has hosted several street art *convocatarias* (public contests) and has a great number of murals, pieces, tags and stencils. Finally, this was the site of a protest launched by Don Popo, who called graffiti writers and street artists to protest for their

freedom of speech and their right to the city. Thus, Bogota's Calle 26 is the perfect site to study the intersection of art, vandalism, legal frameworks and social movements in a Latin American context. By examining the different events that played out on this street, I will be able to elucidate how Bogotá's city official tested out new ways to handle urban art, and hopefully, show some of the contradictions but also the positive effects of this strategy.

There is yet another methodological reason for focusing on this street. By reducing the geographical scope of my thesis to Calle 26, this particular public space serves like a magnifying glass that allows me to zoom in on issues of Bogotá's particular cityscape (Young, 2014) that otherwise become too nebulous (for a historical background of this street see the next section in this chapter). By focusing on one street I hope to be able to *show* the interactions between graffiti writers, street artists, public officials, and the media. Here I am following Auyero and Berti who described their project in these terms: "Rather than "telling" about violent interactions and concatenations, we will… privilege the "ethnographic showing" (Auyero & Berti, 2015, p. 17).

Having said this, my own showing will use different sources in order to overcome the limitations of my brief (but highly intense) fieldwork. I am modeling my own research on Setha Low's study reported in "On The Plaza" (2010). Low analyzes two plazas in Costa Rica from different perspectives. She uses a wide variety of data gathered via ethnographic methods but also through historical analysis and mappings of the different users of these plazas, and provides a discourse analysis where she puts together a series of literary accounts from other authors in her own work. In this way she manages

to triangulate her findings and clearly *shows* the "politics of public space and culture" (Low, 2010) in a very specific location.

In my particular case, I will strive to analyze the way different mainstream media outlets, including *El Espectador* and *El Tiempo,* Colombia's two main national newspapers, portray this cultural phenomena. But it is also important to document the way street artists and graffiti writers use the Internet not only to showcase their work and self-represent but also to engage in public debates. The fight for public space within the urban art scene is also fought in the Internet, not only on the streets. For this reason, I have been very active on different social media platforms (mainly Facebook, Instagram and too a lesser degree Flickr), which has allowed me to follow the different controversies and conversations that are happening right now in Bogotá's urban art scene. This in turn, permits me to triangulate my ethnographic evidence by demonstrating the interactions between regular media, graffiti writers, street artists, police officers, city officials, and in a more abstract sense, Bogota's permissive legal framework.

Finally, I also conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with different grafiteras/os and street artists. In the chapters 3 and 4 I will extensively quote from these interviews to "show" my theoretical claims. In order to protect the identity of my interviewees I will denote them with a letter. Most scholars tend to use the artists and writers street names or tags but I have decided not to do so for two different reasons. First, the people I interviewed use their street names in social media platforms and therefore could be easily be identified by anyone who cared to look it up (this could include a police officer or other street artist). Given that some of the actions they told me about are illegal even

within Bogotá's flexible legal framework, I do not want my own academic investigation to pose a risk to the security or well-being of the people that allowed me to interview them. Second, precisely because I am using the interviewees' words to make my own academic claims, I want to take full responsibility for the statements put forward in the following sections. By hiding their identities I hope to shift whatever criticisms my thesis may evoke from what they said to what I have written. Having said this, I will give a copy of my thesis to the people that I interviewed to receive feedback directly from them. Obviously I will let each interviewee know what letter denotes her or him. There is, however, a sort of exception. Throughout this thesis I will quote from artists and street artist's blogs and other social media platforms. In this case I will use their street names since they decided to publicly state their views in a public setting such as media outlets or social media platforms.

LIMITATIONS: THE POINT OF VIEW OF KINGS AND QUEENS.

Following Bourdieu I argue that graffiti writers and street artists should be conceptualized as operating within a field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1993). In very rudimentary terms, this means that practitioners take part in a social game. Their position within that game will condition the stance each take towards the practice as a whole. In an interview with Loic Wacquant, Bourdieu argues that "*the strategies of agents depend of the position in the field, that is, in the distribution of the specific capita*l"(L. Wacquant, 1989, p. 40). Therefore, in order to provide a more nuances understanding of the urban art scene scholars should strive to interview or conduct

participant observation with different sorts of practitioners, not only the most important ones. Street artists, graffiti writers and muralists all operate in field of urban art that has its own rules form of capital (See Chapter 4).

Indeed, Alison Young reminds us that "*…street art is not just a cultural practice, but a culture in itself, with hierarchies, conventions, and forms of inclusion or exclusion*" (Young, 2014, p. 25). Scholars unaware of the unspoken street's rules may reproduce the power dynamic at play when attempting to portray this cultural phenomena in a positive light. Thus, even sympathetic analysis, those that go beyond criminalizing this practice (Ferrell, 1996) typically rely on the opinions of the most renowned practitioners, or the *queens* and *kings,* as they are known in the street. What better way to portray graffiti and street art in a positive light than to interview its most prominent practitioners? This overemphasis on the best writers and artists, however, may lead to the perpetuation of asymmetrical power relationships inherent in this contested cultural practice.

My own investigation was not the exception to this particular bias since I sought out the most renowned names in Bogotá's urban scene. During the initial stages of my fieldwork it was easier for me to contact established graffiti writers, street artists or muralists. Most of them had already been interviewed by journalists, or by other social scientists. In some cases, some of these writers and artists had even written academic articles. I rarely talked to or followed practitioners who were merely starting their incursion into this cultural practice. Known as "toys" in the U.S street art world, they have only a few years "hitting" the street. And yet, their opinions matter too, precisely because "the strategies of agents depend of the position in the field" (Wacquant, 1989, p.

40). In other words, the attitude a muralist may hold towards Bogotá's legal framework or her/his opinion on the 26th street may be radically different from a toy who only tags in the city. Instead of overcoming this limitation I want to highlight it by adding a brief description to the letter that denotes my interviewees. In this way, readers may have some clue as to where my interviewee is situated within the urban art scene.

STORYTELLING AS URBAN PLANNING:

This work will strive to weave together these different sources of empirical evidence, seen through very specific theoretical lenses, into cohesive stories. Leonie Sandercock convincingly shows the importance of storytelling within the urban planning tradition when she writes:

> Stories can often provide a far richer understanding of the human condition, and thus of the urban condition, than traditional social science, and for that reason alone, deserve attention. (Sandercock, 2003, p. 12)

My intention, therefore, is to create stories that are accessible to most people but also engage with different theoretical debates. For this reason, apart from this introductory chapter I will strive to avoid academic jargon as much as possible. The stories that I will include in this work will not only help to illustrate the arguments I want to set forth but will also serve to reduce the distance between "outside" researchers and "inside" cultural producers. I will be pleased if my friends from Lavamoatumbá enjoy my text instead of saying "it is too philosophical". Whether they agree with me or not is a different story, but I hope to engage in an honest dialogue with them. For now, let me

narrate the history of my site of investigation so that readers that are not familiar with Bogotá understand why this particular street is so relevant for my investigation. .

THE URBAN IMAGINARIES OF LA AVENIDA 26.

To this day La Avenida del Dorado, as it is known today, connects a significant number of important Colombian private and public entities. It follows a meandering curve to avoid crossing the Universidad Nacional (the National University). This avenue has seen its fair share of political protests as the students of the biggest public university in the country have taken the streets to voice their discontent. Throughout the 1980s political messages were sprayed onto the adjacent walls of this avenue. The headquarters of the left leaning *El Espectador* newspaper were at one point located on this avenue, while those of the more conservative *El Tiempo* as well as the offices of Radio Nacional de Colombia (the country's public radio broadcaster) are still based here. Consequently, mainstream media has always experienced the power of spray-canned words. *Semana*, the country's most influential magazine, referred to this avenue as the most important and valuable in Colombia. This was in part because 89 hotels, several transnational corporations, and Bogotá's famous Transmilenio, one of the first Bus Rapid Transit systems in the world, are located along this street (Revista Semana, 2014).

The history of 26th street is crucial to my investigation. Modernization in Colombia was a bloody process. It was sparked by the murder of the populist presidential candidate, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, during what was known as the *Bogotazo* in 1948. This crucial event catapulted the nation into a period of bi-partisan war popularly

known as La Violencia. The two elite parties, the right wing *Conservadores* and the left wing *Liberales*, working in conjunction appointed General Rojas Pinilla, a strong military figure who would pacify the country. Once in power, Rojas Pinilla made it his central goal to bring "modernization" to Colombia. As a part of his modernizing agenda, he introduced television to the country and decided to improve Bogota's infrastructure. One of his major enterprises was the construction of the new airport, El Dorado. The airport was built between 1955 and 1959 in what at the time were the outskirts of Bogotá. The airport needed to be connected to the city center, and thus 26th street was built (for a historical view of this avenue see Del Castillo Daza, 2008; For a journalistic account see La Rotta, 2010).

Fast-forward a few decades to 2008, when the newly elected left-wing mayor Samuel Moreno Rojas (and the grandson of Rojas Pinilla), announces that he will expand the Transmilenio through the Avenida del Dorado. However, year after year passes and the work is nowhere near completion. It turns out that Moreno is involved in one of the biggest political corruption scandals in the country. He allocated the largest infrastructural projects, such as the third stage of Transmilenio, to a single group of businessmen, who would in turn give him a percentage of the money they would receive from the state (El Tiempo, 2015a; Lancheros, 2012). The corruption scandal, popularly known as el Carrusel de la Contratación, eventually led to Moreno's apprehension and destitution.

After Moreno's fall from power, a former member of the urban guerrilla movement M-19, Gustavo Petro, was elected Mayor of Bogotá. Petro became a well-respected

congressman because he publicly denounced Rojas Moreno, even though both of them belonged to the same political party at the time, Polo Alternativo Democratico. In his campaign for the office of Mayor of Bogotá, he promised to finish the Transmilenio on 26th Street. Once in office, he delivered on his promise, but more importantly to this investigation, he also signed the Decreto 632 in 2014 that established:

> El proyecto de diseño urbano "Eje de la Paz y la Memoria" tiene por objeto fortalecer un espacio urbano de reconocimiento y remembranza de los hechos y víctimas de la violencia, a partir de transformaciones en tomo a los Conjuntos Monumentales de Espacio Público localizados alrededor del eje de la Avenida Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (Calle 26), con el fin de contribuir a la reparación integral de las víctimas de hechos violentos ocurridos en la historia reciente de la ciudad y el país.

The story comes full circle: the avenue that was dreamt of by a dictator to be the road to modernization became imagined as an open-air gallery that commemorates the victims of the long history of violence in Colombia. In addition, the mayor who promoted the project was the man responsible for denouncing the dictator's grandson for stealing the funds meant for building a sustainable mass transportation system on the same road. This avenue, therefore, has come to be seen as a symbol of Colombia's violent history, the corruption of its political elites, as well as its contradictory path towards modernization. Whoever thinks Gabriel García Marquez's magic realism is pure fantasy has clearly not lived in a Colombian city.

Chapter 2: Latin American graffiti and street art

DENATURALIZING THE CRIMINAL IMAGE.

Critical urban scholarship encourages us to conceive the city as a text. For instance, Sassen asks herself "if the city has a speech" (Sassen, 2013) while Holston invites us to read the stucco of the city's walls as another literary construct (Holston, 1999). Furthermore, in the Latin American context, this tradition has a crucial antecedent in Angel Rama's "La Ciudad Letrada" (2002), where the author shows what is the relationship between written letters and power. In a sense all these authors show how a careful observer may read in cityscapes the different power relationships that are reflected in its heterogeneous spaces (Foucault, 1999b). Whether it is the interaction between culture and space in a "plaza" (Low, 2010), the inscriptions of affects in a Turkish multiethnic neighborhood (Mills, 2010), or the struggle of homeless people to gain their right to the city in public parks (Mitchell, 2003), cityscapes can be made legible and its "reading" may provide crucial insights into the operations of power within urban settings. Although this theoretical perspective is useful for understanding how urban art operates within and against different cityscapes, there are certain limitations to this approach that are important to address. To better illustrate these limitations let me begin with one of my first diary entries in my fieldwork in Bogotá.

La Candelaria – Bogotá: 17 de Junio – 4:40pm

Early in the morning one day during the second week of my fieldwork, I had set up a meeting via Facebook with *JY* who runs an "urban and contemporary art gallery" in La Candeleria, Bogotá's historical downtown. As I walked the steep cobblestone streets towards the gallery, I decided to take a slight detour and visit El Chorro de Quevedo, a place saturated with street art and graffiti. To my surprise I saw some *grafiteras* working on three large *pieces*. As I start engaging with them, a policeman in a Segway approaches us. He asks them if they have the appropriate permit to paint that wall. They clearly do not have the physical paper (and I'm not sure if they had the permission at all) but *LC* who clearly knows Bogotá´s legal framework starts arguing with the policeman: "do you think we would be painting in the middle of the day without a permit? Besides we are being sponsored by the *localidad* [the neighborhood's executive authority.]" After 20 minutes of discussions the policeman clearly still has his doubts but decides that is not worth arguing any more so he simply lets them be. Despite this, as he walks (or more precisely rolls) away, he shouts back to them: "Me lo dejan bien bonito" (*make it beautiful for me*).

How was this interaction possible? The mental image most people have of graffiti is that of young male adolescents "defacing" public property, painting in the middle of the night and running from police officers whenever they made an appearance. This

stereotype is both perpetuated and celebrated by books like Naar and Mailer's *The Faith of Graffiti* (2010), or Castleman's classic *Getting Up* (1984)[4], movies such as *Bomb the System* (Lough, 2002), Banksy's *Exit Through the Gist Shop (2010)* or *Cidade Cinza* (Mesquita & Valiengo, 2013), a documentary about a mural created by Sao Paulo's graffiti writers Os Gemeos. Thus, popular media rarely depict grafiteras[5] or women street artists leveraging legal arguments against a police officer, who in turn, allows them to continue their work but demands an aesthetically pleasing artwork.

Beyond the popular media depictions, however, even the scholarly literature on graffiti and street art is ill equipped to conceptualize what I witnessed that sunny evening in Bogotá. On the one hand, most sociological studies tend to focus on: 1) the ways state actors and the mainstream media criminalizes these subjects and how the artists and writers react against these forms of control, and 2) the way the art market dilutes the transgressive nature of graffiti by placing it in a gallery (Cresswell, 1996). Castleman's classic *Getting Up* (1984)[6] documented the evolution of graffiti in New York during the 1970's, when it was considered an epidemic. It is one of the first ethnographies that engaged with graffiti writers in order to document their lived experiences. The tension between vandalism and art within graffiti was further developed by Lachmann (1988)

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4 The mythical status of this book can be asserted by a simple anecdote. When I checked out this book from the library I found that someone had actually done a couple of *tags* in its front and back cover pages. That is, *Getting Up* is still influential enough for someone to actually scribble in its pages.

5 The gendered grafiter*a* in Spanish is intentional.

6 The classical status of this book can be asserted by a simple anecdote. When I checked out this book from the library I found that someone had actually done a couple of *tags* in its front and back cover pages.

who showed how graffiti writers created an alternative economic career out of this "crime". Stewart (1994) investigated the intersection between writing and crime and how "graffiti writers" used the marketing's mechanisms but profoundly subvert its meaning. For this author this was ultimately the reason graffiti become a crime: it is advertisement that sells nothing other than the anonymous identity of its author.

Criminologists have also conducted significant ethnographic research in order to understand graffiti writers' and street artists' motivations. Ferrell (1995, 1996) portrays graffiti as an act of resistance and shows how the graffiti writers in Denver are "criminalized" by the media and the local politicians, and Austin discusses "how graffiti art became an urban crisis" (Austin, 2001). Conversely Halsey and Young (2002, 2006) investigate the affective dimension of graffiti writers and street artists in order to understand their intentions and how to properly regulate them.

Some scholars emphasize the gendered nature of this practice. Indeed, Nancy Macdonald conducted an ethnographic research in New York and London to show how graffiti writers build their masculinity (Macdonald, 2001). Whereas a more careful analysis of this issue is outside the scope of my present work, it is important to bear in mind that the gendered aspect of graffiti and street art is also continually being contested. Women too are part of the current debate in Bogotá, and elsewhere, that strives to define what urban art is. For example, two recent art books are starting to challenge the notion that there are no female practitioners within this cultural phenomenon. *Graffiti Women: Street Art from Five Continents* (Ganz, 2006) is intended to be global on scope whereas *Women street artists of Latin America: art without fear* (Cassandra & Gucik, 2015), as its

title suggest is geographically bounded[7]. Having said this there is still some room for scholars to go beyond the trope that urban art and street art belongs exclusively to men's realm.

Another important area of inquiry in scholarship on street artists and graffiti writers is the relationship between public space and urban art. Moving beyond his first studies of graffiti as a urban crisis (Austin, 2001), Austin re-conceptualizes graffiti and street art as enhancements to public space (Austin, 2010). On the other hand, Teresa Caldeira in her *Imprinting and Moving Around* argues that the *pixações*[8] in *São Paulo*:

> [T]ake inequality for granted and thus naturalize it. They choose aggression and transgression as their mode of articulation while simultaneously speaking the language of rights and liberties and affirming a deep pleasure in freely moving around the city. They challenge a certain common ground but do not evoke recognized alternatives, such as those articulated in terms of citizenship and equality. These practices thus require a new conceptualization of democratic public space and of the role of subaltern citizens in producing the city
>
> (Caldeira, 2012, p. 400)

Excluding Caldeira, it is important to note that most scholarly studies written in English only analyze European, U.S. or Australian cities (another important exception is Morrison, 2014). For example, Austin (2001), Castleman (1984), and Lachamn (1988) all

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[7] Interestingly most of the grafiteras and Street artists showcased in this book come from Bogotá. Apparently the authors, two street artists from the U.S first traveled to Colombia and from there visited other Latin American countries.

[8] *Pixaçao* is the specific form of tagging from São Paulo.

focus exclusively on New York[9]. Ferrell (1995, 1996) conducted his fieldwork in Denver while Halsey and Young (2002, 2006) analyzed the Australian street art and graffiti scene. The Eurocentric literature tends to skew the analysis of graffiti and street art towards the legal and aesthetic status of this cultural phenomenon, while the few studies that focus on graffiti and street art in Latin America tend to emphasize their political[10] dimensions: Chafee explores how street art is used in political protests (Chaffee, 1993); following this line of inquiry, Kaiser (2008) shows how human rights activist in Buenos Aires incorporate stencils as a tool for their cause. A similar argument is put forth by Kane (2009) who also includes Rosario, Argentina as one of the cities of her study. Therefore, studies that focus on non-European contexts tend to foreground the explicitly political nature of this cultural expression.

As Low (2010) argues, power relationships are not only inscribed in the public space´s physicality but also in the way that scholars write and talk about these spaces[11]. And I also add that the geographical location of these places matters significantly as well. Let me briefly discuss Alison Young's *Street Art, Public City* (2014) to illustrate my point.

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9 As important as New York is for graffiti writers it is over-studied by scholars and journalists alike thus perpetuating its mythical nature.

10 In the doble sense of *political* protest and electoral *politics*

11 Indeed writing about the "construction" of the two public plazas in Puerto Rico she wrote: "The power relations of plaza design form are not just about its spatial and architectural production, however, but include the hegemony of Eurocentric scholarship and writing found in architectural history. The published word has had more influence than the commonsense examination of the landscape. Thus, power relations are embodied in language as wells as in physical design, and written "history" – rather than the examination of multicultural histories- has the greatest power of all". (Low, 2010, p. 87)

Young's analysis is quite thoughtful and eloquent. She manages to capture most of the issues of graffiti and street art as no other author that I have read. One of her main arguments is that each urban area has its own "cityscape." In her own words: "each city… produces its own situational art. Graffiti writers and street artists are always already responding to a city's surfaces, spaces, architecture and aesthetics" (Young, 2014, p. 88). To prove this point, she analyzes five different cityscapes: New York, Berlin, Paris, Melbourne, and Amsterdam. I readily agree that "situational art" (this is Young's category that subsumes street art and graffiti) is a reaction to a given cityscape. Nonetheless, I contend that the cityscape is also shaped by a particular legal system as well as specific bureaucratic and political organizations. Although Young does consider how legal systems criminalize graffiti and street art, when analyzing the legal construction of graffiti she only focuses on cities with a common law legal system (Melbourne). That is, she fails to investigate how cities within a civil law tradition criminalized this cultural practice—even though she has extensively walked through cities with civil law traditions like Berlin or Paris. Even more importantly, she only mentions cities that implement repressive strategies. What about places where these cultural expressions are more readily allowed? What happens in a city that is already saturated (to borrow from Morrison, 2014) with street art and graffiti? Places where the strategy to erase and criminalize these works is contested by different social actors? Or, when policemen have to operate within a violent context where the defacement of private and public property seems like a bland nuance? By focusing exclusively on New York

and Melbourne, Young's analysis fails to recognize the complete spectrum of regulating mechanisms of a phenomenon that is global in scale, and her Eurocentric analytical framework ultimately cannot explain LC's lived experience.

Paradoxically, after my random encounter with LC, I found out that she is also an active member of the Mesa Distrital del Graffiti. This is a participatory process promoted by IDARTES. The purpose of the MDG is to reach a consensus between IDARTES's officials and graffiti writers and street artists on how best to regulate this cultural expression. In fact, this participatory process is directly linked to the Decreto 75, a decree that promotes and regulates the "artistic and responsible practice of graffiti". The way graffiti writers and street artists actually operate, move and paint in Bogotá is significantly different than in the U.S. where they can actually be imprisoned for an extended period of time. In Bogota, on the other hand, this new decree has taken a lot of power away from the police, who now cannot legally incarcerate graffiti writers or street artists. This off-hand approach has led to a proliferation of urban art in the city. Places like São Paulo, Valparaiso, or the West Bank (Peteet, 1996) each have particular legal systems that react to and against graffiti and street art. However, in Bogotá a set of circumstances that I will tease out in the following chapter has made urban art highly tolerated by the police, local politicians, and the public in general. In fact Gustavo Petro, the former mayor of Bogotá, sought to generate a dialogue between city officials, graffiti writers and street artists in order to establish appropriate rules and regulations. Therefore, this thesis will showcase some of Bogota's innovative legal mechanisms to (de)regulate graffiti and street art.

But perhaps more importantly, I also want to explore the inherent tensions in these mechanisms. Indeed, an important question that I want to answer (or at least pose) is, How can transgression be democratically regulated? What are the limitations of participatory processes such as the MDG? Ultimately I want to explore the seemingly paradoxical nature of Bogotá's Ley 75: this ordinance promotes a "responsible and artistic form of graffiti", and yet, graffiti is a cultural practice that is ultimately and inherently transgressive. On the other hand, it is also important to note that graffiti writers and street artists react in different ways to each cityscape. Artists and writers deploy different tactics to deal with different social actors, whether these are art collectors, police officers, as well as politicians and high-level bureaucrats.

THE VIEW FROM LATIN AMERICA: URBAN IMAGINARIES

In order go beyond the biases and limitation of Eurocentric literature it is crucial not only to investigate urban art in cities outside the U.S and Europe, but also to include scholars in different latitudes that have thought and conceptualize this issue in novel ways. In particular, for the purposes of my study I find it productive to engage with two Latin American scholars: Armando Silva and Néstor García Cancilini. Building on Lynch's *Image of the City* (1960), both Canclini (2006) and Silva (1992) have extensively develop a concept they call "urban imaginaries". Whereas Lynch's "images" are the mental maps that ordinary citizens use to move within an urban environment, the concept of urban imaginaries captures the tension between the empirically observable city and the changes that the public imagines and strives for in its urban environment (for

more on the difference between Lynch and Canclini see Brookshank-Jones, 2005). This notion is particular useful in the case of Bogotá because, as Canclini says, "a city is always heterogeneous, amongst other reasons, because different imaginaries inhabit it" (Lindón, 2007). Graffiti and street art are imaginaries not only that inhabit Bogotá but are actually imprinted in a significant amount of its walls. Silva, on the other hand, argues that graffiti and street art play a crucial role in the creation of urban imaginaries (Silva, 1988) given that they visually represent and challenge the exacerbated heterogeneity of and in Latin American cities. He considers that graffiti is necessarily a political action because it questions the hegemonic production of images. Both authors propose alternative methods to capture the urban imaginary: Silva used a questionnaire coupled with interviews that, asked regular citizens, in part, for the smell and colors of certain streets in Bogotá and Sao Paulo. Canclini showed black and white photographs and short films of México to different focus groups and then asked them to collectively select the images that best represented their daily routines in the city.

It is also important to note that Silva has written about graffiti and street art in Bogotá for over 20 years and has become a public expert on this issue. For example, he was recently interviewed by a local news agency for a television show titled "*Grafitis: ¿arte o vandalism?"* (Caracol Radio, 2013). In it he argued talked about the inherently transgressive nature of graffiti, which made it seem as if he was speaking out against this cultural practice. But quite the opposite was true. Silva was making a theoretical rather than a normative claim about graffiti, and he has a long history of inspiring graffiti

writers and street artists in Bogotá. See for example the following comment on a blog post that I will analyze further one:

> Entiendo, y para mi es claro, que cuando yo hago el graffiti que se me da la reputa gana en donde se me de la gana por diversión, escribir mi nombre o lo que sea es GRAFFITI, es mi graffiti y tiene toda esa serie de condicionantes que unos aprendieron por leer el SubwayArt, el Getting up, ver Style Wars o por lo escrito por Armando Silva en el 86 en el seno de la Nacional, por seguir a Banksy, o lo que sea.[12]

This user clear knows Armando Silva's theoretical discussions, which have prompted artists and writers to learn about urban art in Bogotá and other latitudes (he also worked extensively in Sao Paulo, Brazil). At the same time he can also provide an expert gaze for mainstream media outlets as his appearance on national television proofs. For this reason I sought him out and during my fieldwork and he granted me an interview. It was him that encourage me to think how Petro's alcaldía and the Decreto 75 was effectively killing graffiti and street art: by allowing it to be done anywhere it lost its appeal. In a sense I am trying to provide empirical evidence for the highly theoretical claims that this semiologist has made for over 20 years.

Despite my affinities with the urban imaginary framework, neither Canclini nor Silva truly engages with graffiti writers and street artists. They rather use the art itself to

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[12] "I understand, and for me it is clear, that when I do the graffiti that I fucking want, wherever I want to and doing it just for fun, writing my name or whatever is GRAFFITI, then that is my graffiti and it has all those characteristics that some learnt by reading the SubwayArt, the Getting Up, or watching Style Wars o what Armando Silvia wrote back in 86´ in the midst of the National University, or by following Bansky or whatever"

illustrate a new form of citizenship without actually interviewing or interacting extensively with the creators of these images. To support my position I will deploy the ethnographic approaches used by authors like Castleman (1984), Ferrell (1996) or Young (Young, 2014). Hopefully, my ethnographic research will serve to expand the sociological understanding of this phenomenon, highlighting how the research conducted outside Latin America is limited precisely because it only considers very similar legal contexts. By deploying these ethnographic methodologies to a Latin American context and engaging with scholars from that region, I seek to better understand LC´s lived experience in Bogotá. Hopefully this will also provide a more robust understanding of graffiti and street art as a global urban phenomenon.

Chapter 3: Regulating Transgression

Despite Bogotá's progressive legal framework, most of the time graffiti writers and street artists create unsanctioned works of art that are deemed illegal by the authorities. Research has shown that the illegality of this cultural phenomenon is part of its appeal (Halsey & Young, 2002, 2006), yet this same illegality is a social construction promoted by certain state actors and mainstream media (Ferrell, 1995, 1996). Ironic as it may sound, some practitioners mentioned that they would like to see harsher measures adopted as a way to prevent unsanctioned works of street art and graffiti because it would promote the quality of urban art. Other practitioners, however, actively engage in the Mesa Distrital del Grafiti, a participatory process operated by the Secretaría de Cultura, Deportes y Recreación (SCDR or Secretaría de Cultura, henceforth) and the Instituto Distrital de Artes (IDARTES, henceforth) in which writers and artists are invited to openly discuss with members of the city government. Also, while some graffiti writers choose not to participate in the mesa, not all municipal stakeholders are represented either: the most noticeable absences are police officers and representatives of the city's planning department or IDU (for its acronym in Spanish).

In this chapter I seek to understand what led former mayor Gustavo Petro to advocate for a deregulation of street and graffiti in Bogotá, Colombia. First I will do a quick review of the regulations set in place to control this transgressive cultural practice. I then draw extensively from an interview I conducted with a high profile functionary of Bogotá's Secretaría de Cultura as a way to understand the purpose behind Decreto 75 and why its final version was not as radical as SCDR officials expected it to be. I hope to

show some of the limitations of the city's attempt to institutionalize a cultural practice that has an uneasy relationship with legality, to say the least. Lastly, I analyze a booklet distributed by IDARTES as a proxy for what the Petro administration promotes as responsible and artistic graffiti. Throughout this chapter I strive to show that even a progressive government seeks to shape street art and graffiti in a particular way, even when attempting to deregulate it. Although urban art, specifically murals, were sponsored during the administration of this particular city government, it is also true that the street artists and graffiti writers operated outside of the new legal boundaries to make urban art one of the most conspicuous aspects of Bogotá's cityscape. Therefore, I contend that a fruitful way to go beyond the dichotomy of legal/illegal is to understand the urban art scene in terms of legibility. The state will promote murals that can be "appreciated" by the public at large, while condemning illegible letters or *rayones* (scratches). Rethinking the urban art scene as a space in which legibility matters allows us to move away from the legal/illegal dichotomy, into an understanding of the scene that is better equipped to capture its complexities.

My main argument is that in Bogotá, street art and graffiti is being "institutionalized" through increased legibility. That is to say, the murals and large pieces that are supported by IDARTES and the Secretaría de Cultura can be read by the public because of their institutionalized legibility. This enhanced legibility typically entails beautiful images whose form and content accord with common cultural imagery in Colombia, a clear message, or both.

RULES AND REGULATIONS BEFORE THE DECRETO 75

Before the Decreto 75 there was no law or regulation that defined what was legal and what was illegal when it came to graffiti and street art (Secretaria de Cultura, Recreación y Deporte, 2013). Given that there were neither clear sanctions nor rules governing this practice, the ultimate decision of how to handle street artists and graffiti writers fell upon police officers. On certain occasions the police officers would overstep their authority. In the interviews I conducted, some graffiti writers told me of beatings and other forms of harassment, like police officers seizing the spray cans from them and then using them to paint their faces. This ambiguous situation lead to the death of Luis Felipe Becerra, aka Tripido, a young graffiti writer that was killed by a policeman. This story soon became known in the mainstream media as the "caso grafitero" [the graffiti writer's case]. Beccerra's story illustrates the inefficiency of the judiciary system in Colombia, especially when it has to condemn a police officer: to this day, there has been no official sanction against the officer who shot Becerra (El Tiempo, 2015b; Orozco Tascón, 2015). Partly because of the way the media portrayed the caso grafitero, this particular event forced the Petro administration to regulate this cultural practice (for a source in English on this issue see Brodzinsky, 2013). Furthermore, police officers started to receive a higher degree of scrutiny since the public in general would have not tolerated any other violent incident against graffiti writers or street artists. Urban art therefore was in a judicial limbo and after the senseless killing of Becerra a de facto agreement was created: policemen would no longer actively target graffiti writers or street artists.

Before this tragic event, however, there had been different governmental efforts to promote a different sort of street art and graffiti in the city. The left wing Luis Eduardo Garzón, also from the Polo Democrático, was the first mayor to provide some sort of institutional support for graffiti and street art. This initiative was called "Muros Libres" and it basically consisted in allowing artists to freely do their work on specific walls of some major avenues (El Tiempo, 2007). This was the first time in Bogotá where street artists -as opposed to muralists- and graffiti writers where given large spaces where they could work without fear of being harassed by the police. By all standards this measure was a success.

After Garzon's administration Moreno Rojas came to power and while he did not support any sort of street art or graffiti, during his administration this cultural practice proliferated. This was because Moreno's administration initiated but never finished a series of large infrastructure projects, opening up new spots for street artists and graffiti writers to intervene. The photo that goes along an article titled "La Vía de la Vergüenza" (The Shameful Pathway) about the Avenida del Dorado (See Image 2.1) was meant to show the unfinished state of this avenue. However, if you look closely you can see that a couple of throw-ups were done in one of its adjacent walls. The vacuum left by a corrupt political system soon was intervened by the urban art scene.

In context of this history, what happened with Tripio would force Gustavo Petro to not only complete the new stage of Transmilenio but also rethink the city government's relationship with the urban art scene. For this reason, in the next section I

will turn to a key interviewee who, working on behalf of the Secretaría de Cultura, was one of the creators of the Decreto 75.

Image 2.1: Photo taken by Diana Sánchez. Notice the throw-ups or *bombas* on the hand right side of the picture.

HOW TO REGULATE A TRANSGRESSION

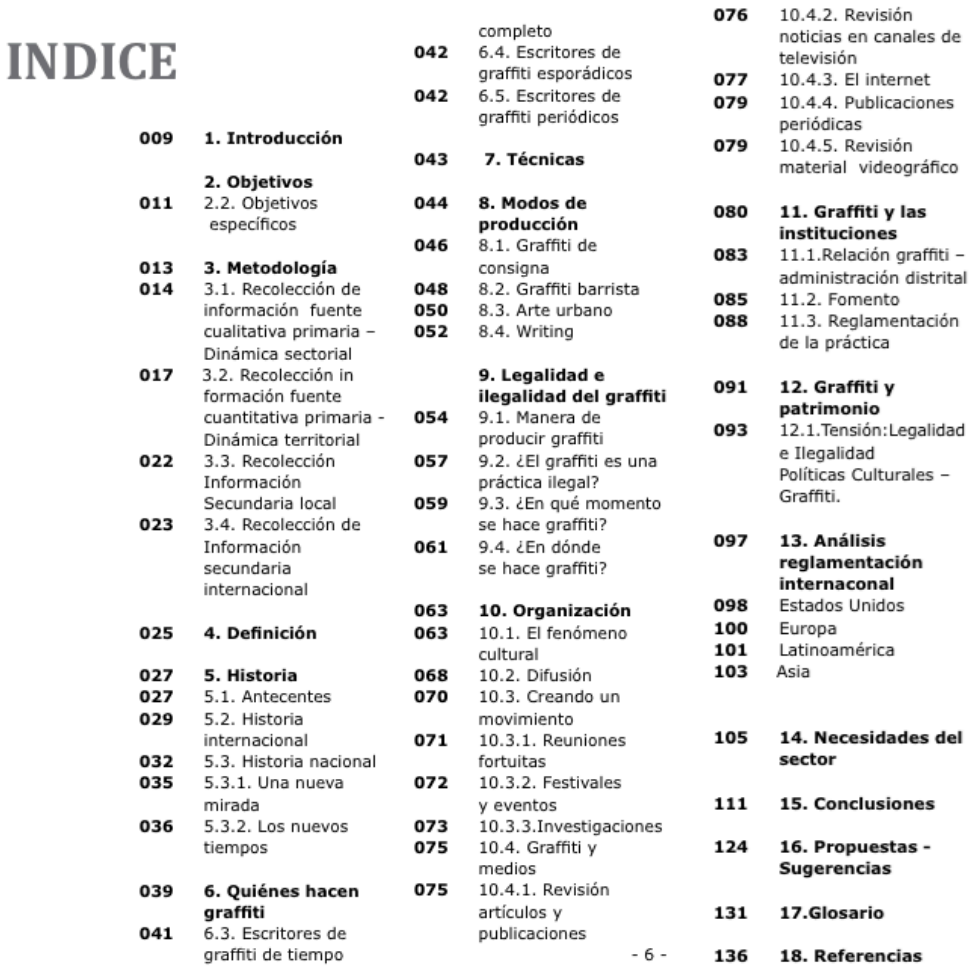
I first asked P what was his role in drafting the Decreto 75, and to my surprise he answered that he was one the persons in charge of creating this law. In fact, he told me that:

> Una de las instrucciones de la Secretaría de Cultura en el momento fue la de buscar una reglamentación del graffiti totalmente distinta a la que hasta en ese momento

existía en Bogotá. En Bogotá en ese momento existía un enfoque prohibicionista, simplemente no se podía hacer ningún graffiti o para poder hacerlo toca cumplir con una serie de requisitos de imposible cumplimiento. Tocaba cumplir requisitos ambientales como si fuera una valla, tocaba cumplir requisitos tributarios como si fuera un espectáculo público o una publicidad y pues claramente no tenía nada que ver con lo que estaba sucediendo con el graffiti. La instrucción entonces fue la de buscar una concertación con La Mesa Distrital del Graffiti, se llama, o Mesa Distrital de Grafiteros, en la que se reunían los grafiteros y varios funcionarios de la Secretaría de Cultura y del IDARTES, y de la Secretaría de Planeación de Bogotá, para tratar de encontrar una solución al problema más buena para todos.

Indeed, before this new regulation was even drafted there was no clarity about the state's role vis a vis the urban art scene (Secretaria de Cultura, Recreación y Deporte, 2013). The first written analysis of this cultural phenomenon, at least in the Petro government, was the "Diagnóstico Graffiti Bogotá 2012". The use of the word "diagnostic" in the title reflect the ways in which graffiti and street art have been discursively understood as a form of urban blight, an illness that need to be diagnose before you can cure it" an urban crisis (Austin, 2001) that needs to be cured. The index of the report, which was conducted by Santiago Raúl Castro, reflects the particular experts gaze attempt to "dissect" a cultural phenomenon into neat categories. (See Image 2.2). This cover page says "Informe Final / Versión Preliminar/ Solo Para Comentario/ No Citar" (Final Inform/ Preliminary Version/ Only For Comments/ Do Not Cite"). To the best of my knowledge there is no official public version of the report so I cannot

directly site it, but I suggest this index reflects what Foucault calls bio-power (Foucault, 1999a; Foucault & Rabinow, 1984); i.e. a form of hegemonic knowledge deployed to better understand a social "problem" in order to control and eradicate it.



INDICE

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Image 2.2: Table of contents of the Diagnóstico del Grafiti 2012

Since this book was technically not made public there is no way to be certain that P had any knowledge of it. However, he was knowledgeable about the urban art scene and

had probably read it. When I asked him about the use of social media to reach out street artists and graffiti writers, *P* answered:

-No tanto, eso es más voz a voz. Sí, pero y es que hay grafiteros de grafiteros y hay peleas fuertes entre dos tipos de grafiteros.

-¿Qué son cuáles?

- Las barras y los grafiteros que se auto-denominan como artísticos o

-Escritores

-Escritores sí.

-O sea el vandalismo está más asociado a las barras...

-Según ellos sí y según como la administración lo veía, sí. Porque, aparte, el escritor o el grafitero quiere expresar algo y quiere que le quede bien. Y pues, sí tiene que hacerlo rápido y tiene una serie de limitantes pero quiere hacer algo bueno. Pero el barrista es distinto o la marcha política. La marcha política que pues como en la Primero de Mayo [a major avenue in Bogotá] o como en toda la séptima [another important street] pintaron una línea roja de principio a fin. Pero no … pero ese no se puede regular y también es válido como libertad de expresión política. Pero tenían sus diferencias con el comportamiento que asumían esos dos tipos de grafiteros y los veían como distintos a ellos. Y a la Mesa Distrital del Graffiti van casi todos artistas. Entonces hubo varios intentos de reunirnos con tres organizaciones: con los Comandos Azules, la Guardia Biroja-Azul y con Juco, con las Juventudes Comunistas, porque son los que más grafitean la ciudad.

It is clear that the SCDR was trying to reach out to all the *Modos de Producciión* (Modes of Production) that were identified in the *Diagnóstico* (see the numeral 8 in the index). However, only artistic producers actually came to the table to discuss with city officials.

As a result of this shortcoming the Mesa Distrital only included either writers or artists. Besides this limitation, P felt that the Decreto 75 fell short of its intention. On paper, the idea was that this new legislation would be as flexible and as permissive as possible. However, as he explained to me that was certainly not the case:

> -No llego a la magnitud que Ud. imaginó en un principio. ¿Siente que el decreto se quedó corto?
>
> - Sí. Definitivamente. Y es una lástima porque como laboratorio, como experimento social, hubiera sido chévere mostrarlo muy fuerte y bueno puede salir mal o puede salir bien, esas cosas pasan en política pública. Pero aquí quedó tan tibio que yo no podría decir que ese es el camino o que el otro sea el camino. Y bueno en esta convención de grafiteros que le estaba diciendo, hay que o sea muy chévere ver cómo le va a Bogotá y si la auto-disciplina sirve y si las cosas funcionan y si de pronto salen transgresiones artísticas valiosas pero el árbol y la estatua están protegidos pues sería una buena experiencia pero al fin el decreto quedó tan gris que yo no lo calificaría como un buen, como un buen ejemplo de experimento social (P, lawyer)

In P's view the final decree was not adequate because it was not radical enough. He talks about a failed social experiment, precisely because Bogotá's city government had

the opportunity to implement a completely new approach to an old urban crisis. However, his frustration also stems from the fact that the SCDR does not represent the whole city government and that for that matter was at times in contradiction with other entities. The state is not a monolithic entity, it is fractured and different organization within it will have competing goals. The following excerpt makes clear this issue and how it relates to Bogota's urban art scene:

> Porque básicamente en Bogotá se negaba la posibilidad de hacer cualquier tipo de graffiti, de cualquier ... así fuera político, artístico, o de expresión, transgresor, no se podía hacer nada. Luego de varias reuniones con ellos y varias discusiones en las que más de toda la Secretaría de Cultura apoyo a los grafiteros frente a la Secretaría de Planeación quién era quien realmente tenía a la larga el proceso de reglamentación. Fue el de buscar una.. un cambio de enfoque radical antes: todo estaba prohibido salvo lo que estaba expresamente autorizado que era muy pequeño, la idea de la nueva reglamentación era todo está autorizado salvo lo que está expresamente prohibido. Entonces, antes no se podía hacer nada salvo que Ud. pidiera un permiso especial que tenía que pasar por la Secretaría de ambiente, la Secretaría de Planeación, por la Secretaría de Cultura, luego es los muros de la ciudad están abiertos al graffiti pero hay ciertas excepciones que Ud. sí no debe tocar.
>
> -¿Cuáles?
>
> - Qué son por ejemplo árboles, que son por ejemplo monumentos históricos, que son por ejemplo colegios o iglesias pues como lugares de culto o lugares

educativos. Pues una serie de muros que estaban protegidos pero todos los demás estaban liberados.

-¿Incluidos los muros privados?

- Incluido los muros privados, para los muros privados la única condición es que tuviera permiso del propietario. Eso pues era difícil pero pues no se podía no hacer para eso. Ehh los grafiteros eso los llevaba... los animaba a un proceso de auto-disciplina. Estuvieron.. están muy comprometidos con la idea de que ese tipo de libertad hacía que realmente se respetara los muros que realmente debían ser respetados. Como por ejemplo las estatuas o la Catedral Primada o el Jardín Infantil. Que ellos decían si nos dejan tranquilamente hacerlo en los muros normales de la ciudad nosotros vamos a comprometernos a no tocar ciertos muros específicos, árboles o cosas por el estilo. Ese fue el propósito. Luego en la negociación entre las distintas Secretarías todo se aguó un poco, entonces dijeron "Listo el enfoque sigue siendo todo se puede".

The tensions between the different city departments did not allow the SCDR to pursue a more radical approach, one that would only prohibit graffiti or street art from very few places, including public monuments and trees. All other surfaces were fair game: public walls could be intervened by anyone; for private ones the artists or writers would only need the permission of the owner of the wall. However, this radical approach had to be accepted by the other city department, which unfortunately for the urban art scene did not happen:

-Esa era la propuesta de la Sec. de Cultura. Ehhh luego entonces ya hubo reuniones con la Secretaría de Planeación y bueno con el Instituto de.. ¿cómo se llama el Instituto del Espacio Público? Se me olvida como se llama en este momento.

-La Defensoría del Espacio Público.

-Esa, esa. Tiene razón y el IDARTES. Y bueno ahí ya había muchas mas entidades, y ya sólo iba un representante de los grafiteros o a veces pues ninguno. Ahí la Secretaría de Cultura y el IDARTES defendieron mucho esa tesis de todo permitido salvo lo prohibido. Presentaron un proyecto de Decreto Distrital en ese sentido y las distintas entidades decían bueno sí pero entonces excluyamos también esto o aquello. Entonces el IDU dijo que debían excluirse todos los puentes, ehh todos los túneles, todos los postes, y se empezó a excluir y a excluir. La Secretaría de Planeación dijo "no, también exclúyase el asfalto, exclúyase también los andenes, exclúyase todo" ….

- Entonces pasamos de permitamos todo a no se permite nada.

-Entonces quedó... iba quedando todo se permite salvo casi todo que quedo escrito como excepción. Entonces ahí hubo una negociación muy fuerte, los puentes quedaron al final como excluidos. Y como permitidos, las culatas quedaron como permitidas, el asfalto, o sea la calle, el pavimento, ese sí quedó excluido. Porque dijeron eso es peligroso y tenían unas razones como más de peso para decir si ud cambia el sentido de la dirección puede causar un accidente, entonces ese quedo excluido. Entonces quedó una negociación en la que no fue tan amplia como quería

la Secretaría de Cultura pero sí fue mucho más abierta de lo que permitía la norma original.

Despite all of P's misgivings, Bogotá's city government did have a novel attitude towards the urban art scene. Murals have appeared all over Bogotá. I interviewed S who was the creator of several of these massive works of art. He witnessed Gustavo Petro's speech when he inaugurated a mural commemorating Gabriel García Márquez:

> Entonces después de eso se hace el acto de inauguración el 19 de abril de 2015 un año después de su muerte en donde asiste el alcalde Gustavo Petro y digamos donde a la final entendemos como ehhh se aprovecha todo el auge del graffiti en Bogotá, todo ese potencial artístico que se tiene en pro de la aprobación de una política, no sé si pública, pero digamos una política sí, estatal. ¿Que trata de qué? De visibilizar su gobierno para crear aceptación. Entonces él dice, Gustavo Petro menciona: "No es que el progreso en las ciudades sólo signifique llenarlas de concreto, de grandes infraestructuras de concreto", a eso se refiere puentes y edificios, sí, todo lo que tenga que ver con renovaciones urbanas, "sí no que también el progreso significa color". Él pone esto último en un lenguaje más coloquial y dice: "vamos a hacer ríos de color para esta ciudad." (S, muralist)

As a political science student, S knows very well the history on the various legislation affecting street art and graffiti. Not surprisingly, he has a sympathetic albeit critical view of Petro's administration, recognizing the benefits of a new policy towards graffiti and street art while suggesting that Petro was using this legislation for his own electoral interest. Be this as it may, the fact remains that Bogotá's urban art scene

received significant institutional support (See Image 2.3), making Bogotá a city internationally recognized for its urban art (Cathcart-Keays, 2015; Wulfhart, 2015; Zapata, 2016).

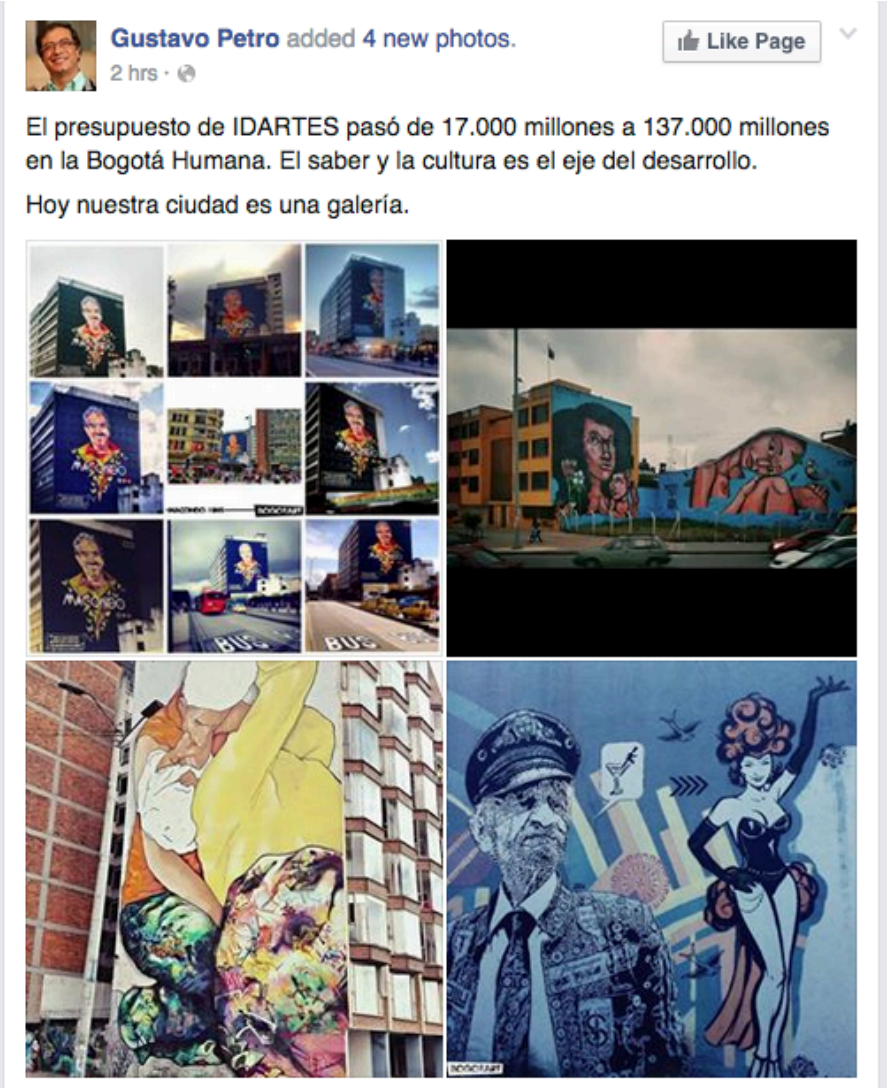

Image 2.3: Tweet of former Gustavo Petro showcasing the best of the "responsible and artistic graffiti" in Bogotá.

RESPONSIBLE AND ARTISTIC GRAFFITI?

What is the urban art sponsored by the Petro administration? In other words, how does "responsible and artistic graffiti" look like? During my last trip to Bogotá IDARTES was promoting a publication titled *Arte Urbano: 80 Graffitis 2012-2015*. It contains 30 postcards and 15 posters all showing some sort of urban art. Santiago Trujillo, the director of IDARTES, writes that the purpose of this collection is to "build the basis for a respectful dialogue amongst the creators of this artistic expression and the city". His text also lists the success of the program since the department he runs sponsored 200 interventions of large and medium scale. This document gives some clues of the nature of the urban art that the state is willing to put up in Bogotá's walls.

Let me first start with the postcards. All in all there are 30 but they have 40 pictures in total (some postcards have two or three images). Most of the images are of complete murals but there are some pictures of details. However, and most interestingly, roughly half of the postcards credit the authors of the urban art whereas the other half does not. Out of the 16 postcards with a 21 photos that *do* credit the creators of the murals, only 4 (or 25%) postcards have images of what I would call graffiti. All the other images where creators are credited are murals (for an example see Image 2.4). On the other hand, in the postcards that do not credit the creators there are 40 images in total, and the number of images of graffiti increases significantly: there are 20 (or 50%) photos that show some kind of "graph" or graffiti inspired pieces. These works of art draw more heavily on the visual aesthetic of graffiti since they show some kind of intricate lettering, representing what in the street parlance is known as a *piece*. (See Image 2.5).

Image 2.4: Mural done by 20.26 DC. Note however the “quick pieces”, tags and other unsanctioned art at street level.

For whatever editorial reasons the creators of this publication decided not to credit the works of some authors, something that is not acceptable within the urban art scene. Despite creating urban art, which is said to be free to the public, artists and writers still want to be recognized, especially if someone else is making a profit from their artwork. Leaving aside this issue, which I will analyze further on, what I think is very telling is that un-credited images tend to show graffiti or murals that incorporate the aesthetics of graffiti (there is no precise way to know from the photos that show letters if these pieces

are done legally or not). Thus, IDARTES, the state agency in charge of promoting "responsible and artistic graffiti", only the works of urban art that fit certain standards of legibility will receive funding.

Image 2.5: Master pieces with unacknowledged creators. The back of this postcard only indicates who took the photography (Juan Santacruz/ IDARTES) and the location of the walls.

The issue of legibility becomes more evident when we analyze the posters. These are larger in size but fewer in number, thus the images that they include will tend to be more "important". First, all of the posters show murals. Out of the 15 posters, 13 credit

the author, one is a panorama of the city showing three murals, and one is a close-up of a mural. The last poster is the only one that is fully in color; the other 14 even images show the mural in color and its surroundings in black and white (See Image 2.6). Interestingly the full-color poster does not credit the photographer or the grafitera, which is unfortunate since Cleo, the author of the piece, is an important street artist from Cali, Colombia and one of the few women street artists in the booklet. All of these murals are beautiful, they use popular reference or represents animals, and they have a clear message. This provides them with a high level legibility, a point that does not escape some graffiti writers and street artists:

> "Entonces, no, no me gusta eso, nunca me ha gustado ese tema entonces a partir de ahí ya los murales grandes que o las convocatorias que sacaron grandes, y usted se puede dar una vuelta por Bogotá lo va a ver, todas tienen un mensaje" (L – graffiti writer, participated in the creation of a mural in the 26th Street).
>
> "Es que también es eso si lo formalizas te toca una propuesta, te toca esperar lo que quieren ver, si está de moda hablar de bicicletas entonces vamos a hacer bicicletas. Sabes? Como que se pierde la libertad, volviendo a hablar, que es lo que uno busca de la calle. Como poder decir lo que uno piensa y que al mirar se cruce a quien sea, sabes? En cambio esto es "no pues, queremos hablar que la ciudad no sé qué, que promovemos estos tipos de pensamientos" (N – grafitera who is very proficient with wheat pastes)

Image 2.6: The mural on the right-hand side was done by Vertigo Graffiti based on a picture by Héctor Fabio Zamora (López de Mesa Samudio, 2013; Silva Numa, 2013). However, notice the bombas or throw-ups which are covering what used to be a mural.

These two excerpts and the posters and postcards not only show that IDARTES does in fact promote a legible urban art, but that graffiti writers and street artists are cognizant of this official preference. This has two implications: artists and writers perform a sort of self-censorship, and they have to become visible to the State to benefit from this system. See for example what Laura Cuevas said in the collection she edited with Zas, a well-recognized grafitera:

La calle 26 se convirtió entonces en la representación de los objetivos del

> gobierno de la ciudad: si en el pasado la calle y por lo tanto la ciudad eran la imagen de la corrupción, la mala administración y el caos, ahora las paredes han sido 'maquilladas' con imágenes llenas de color. El pasado ha sido borrado, las cicatrices cubiertas. Ahora los ciudadanos pueden olvidar los errores del pasado, olvidar que los políticos robaron la ciudad, que la policía mató a un artista de graffiti. La calle y los artistas están ahora abrigados por el largo brazo del mercado, la ley y el estado. A los ciudadanos se les permite mirar, pero lo que van a ver ha sido seleccionado por los jurados de la beca, ninguno de ellos un artista de graffiti. Siendo así, el graffiti es re-interpretado como una práctica más cercana al "arte culto" y al diseño urbano que a un movimiento contracultural. (Cuervo & Zas, 2015)

This reinterpretation from a counter-culture movement to a high-brow art was not met without resistance. Once in place, the Decreto 75 was opposed and rejected with a different set of tactics by different street artists and graffiti writers. In the following chapter I seek to describe the different tactics used by artists, showing that they are both heterogeneous and contradictory.

Chapter 4: Transgressing Regulations

Having explored the different ways the Petro administration sought to regulate a transgression and promote responsible and "legible" approach to graffiti, I want to explore the way the urban art scene reacted to this strategy. Before I explore some tactics deployed by the street artists and graffiti writers it is necessary to identify who exactly is transgressing against these novel regulations. After doing this I will explore how different graffiti writers and street artists acquire and use what I call street capital. Finally, I want to show that this cultural practice does indeed alter Bogota's cityscape and that it also be understood as a career that allows certain practitioners to live a good life.

FLUID IDENTITIES AND YET DIFFERENT POSITIONS

I asked all my interviewees what did they think about the events that happened on the 26th street? Initially, I was expecting my interviewees to immediately reference the protest led by Don Popo. However, some of the artists and writers statements about this avenue varied a lot: some muralists mentioned the convocatorias, whereas others told me about works they had done on that street that was covered by a mural. Soon I realized that the particular art form they pursue will inform their opinion about the urban art scene and the events on the Avenida El Dorado. That is to say, following Bourdieu (1993, 2010), I suggest that the position practitioners have within the urban art "field"[13] will inform their

[13] Bourdieu defines this notion in "The Forms Of Capital": "The structure of the field, i.e., the unequal distribution of capital, is the source of the specific effects of capital, i.e., the appropriation of profits and the power to impose the laws of functioning of the field most favorable to capital and its reproduction" (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 84)

perspectives on issues that directly affect their cultural practice. In order to account for the positionality of my interviewees, I will provide enough background to identify their position in the urban art scene without revealing their identities.

In this sense, the main limitation of the *Diagnóstico del Grafiti* is that it assumes that urban artists can be neatly divided into different categories: you either are a barrista, or a grafitera/o, or an "urban artist". However, the identities of the street artists, graffiti writers and muralists are far more flexible. Some may have started as barristas, hooligans who tag the name of their football team, and then become street artists that do larger pieces. A muralist may have learned the basics of the spray can while "writing" political slogans on a national monument like the Palacio de Nariño (the president's residency) or the Congress. And as I said before, even street artists that occasionally tag or bomb the city may have also responded to convocatorias for the 26th Street murals.

This is not to say that there are differences between the different practitioners of Bogota's urban art scene. There clearly are, but the categories of the *Diagnóstico* do not necessarily reflect this diversity of their lived experiences. Not only are all of their works of art, commissioned or not, impressed on Bogotá's public space but they are aggregated by most conservative accounts in the mainstream media into two mutually exclusive categories: vandals who do illegal pieces or artists who embellish Bogotá's cityscape (Caracol Radio, 2013; El Tiempo, 2014; Noticias Caracol, 2015). To be fair, there are more balanced media accounts and more sympathetic observers exist in both more progressive newspapers like *El Espectador* (Don Popo, 2013; El Espectador, 2014a,

2014b; López de Mesa Samudio, 2013) but also in the blogosphere (Ospina, 2012; Stinkfish & {-}, 2014; Vélez, 2014).

My own categorization is meant to present the urban art like a spectrum that goes from the illegal activity which I call graffiti writing, to the clearly legal art best exemplified by murals. Street art then is situated in an uneasy relationship between these two poles. I am trying to avoid overly simplistic categorization while recognizing that muralists proclaim themselves as such and exclusively create stated sponsored murals, or *muro legales* (legal walls) as they are known within the urban art scene. Graffiti writers and street artists, on the other hand, will be more willing to do *muros ilegales,* which at times I call unsanctioned art. In other words, writers and artists for a variety of motives will transgress the regulations of the Decreto 75, and yet, these same writers and artists may also participate in convocatorias for large murals or in the Mesa Distrital del Graffiti.

DIFFERENT WALLS, DIFFERENT TECHNIQUES

As I was walking down la Zona Rosa, one of Bogotá's high-end entertainment districts, I remember T telling me: "Acá toca hacerlo *ninja style*". He was reading his surroundings, knowing that in this part of Bogotá he would probably get caught if he was not stealthy as a ninja. Other writers I spoke with also mentioned this specific area. See the following excerpt with A:

"Digamos uno va a la 85 con 15 en plena Zona T y ud llega y se hace unos roles [using paint rollers instead of aerosol]. *Puede pegar un par tags, o sea hay como*

lugares para hacer tags pero ahí no se puede hacer una bomba tan fácil. O sea esos lugares están súper vigilados tienen muchas cámaras, tombos [slang for policemen] *hay mucho policía pero también hay mucho celadores* [slang for security guard]. *Y son unidos entonces si lo cogen a uno pufff llegan todos. Pues uno ya sabe eso y tampoco se va a meter a loco"*. (A, member of one of the largest crews in Bogotá)

La Zona T or Zona Rosa is a neighborhood full of bars, expensive restaurants and discos, consequently even at night it has a lot of "eyes on the street" as Jane Jacobs (1961) would put it, or as A said: "*esos lugares están super vigilados*". Graffiti writers and street artists react to the socio-economic and spatial configuration of this area by using faster technique, such as tags, stencils, stickers or *roles*[14] . This means that they will avoid doing any type of artwork that will take several minutes to accomplish. A single throw-up or bomba can take up to 5 minutes to execute properly so it is rarely done in an area like the Zona T.

Not all walls are equal. Some are public whereas others are "private". Surveillance cameras, security guards, automatic lights protect the latter while the former cannot afford this level of corporate protection, and are left to fend for themselves. But how does this apply to the investigation on 26th Street? Given that the walls that can be intervened are part of Transmilenio, the city's bus rapid transit infrastructure, they are by all standards public walls. Not even the owners of the businesses on this avenue will watch over these walls because to get to them you must cross four lanes of high-speed traffic.

[14] Pieces done with paint rollers as opposed to spray cans.

Here, there are no eyes on the street, so to speak. Therefore, the surveillance of these walls falls under the scope of public security forces. However, policemen simply cannot watch over all of Bogota's public walls. Besides, ever since the controversy that followed Diego Felipe Becerra's killing, their hands were effectively tied: they rarely do anything to graffiti writers or street artists. Despite this fact, there are still other strategies or mechanisms of control, which in turn prompt different tactics by street artists and graffiti writers.

The first strategy is to erase or "buff" certain "illegal" graffiti, whereas the second is to promote large murals as a way to cover up the most illegible street art pieces. Ironically both strategies basically consist of covering up previous "unsanctioned" art works, whether it is the police doing it with gray paint or artists and writers with murals or masterpieces. These two strategies are still contested, however, in different ways. Grey walls will only entice graffiti writers or street artists to paint over them again, i.e. "to hit them up". As to murals, the reactions are more diverse: some graffiti writers will not participate in the convocatorias and bureaucratic selection processes whereas others might do so, knowing that they can then use the materials that are left over to create their own pieces. Sometimes other street artists and graffiti writers will target these murals but other large pieces are respected.

Let me illustrate these different tactics with a couple of excerpts from interviews I conducted in Bogotá, alongside with pictures, newspaper articles, and social media posts. In the following excerpt I was interviewing a member of a street art collective that won a convocatoria to intervene a massive wall in the Avenida del Dorado:

-Y, ¿cómo hace para escoger los muros?

-Creo que justamente caminar la ciudad le permite a uno ir identificado como en que lugares puede ir uno escribiendo su nombre y eso es así como lo he aprendido yo. Nunca hay como una planeación, más bien es un poco fortuito el encuentro con cada muro. Sin embargo, yo he hecho proyectos de muros muy grandes como el _____ [a mural on 26th Street]. Entonces eso ya es un *mural* que tiene una planeación y una serie de condicionantes, ¿no? Diferente de salir caminando y en un andén escribir su nombre o lo que sea" (Z, more than 12 years in the urban art scene).

When Z says "write your name on the sidewalk" he implies that tagging occurs on some walls whereas murals occur on very different ones. Walking the street implies a "fortuitous" encounter with walls. On the other hand, murals not only require a whole lot more of time and financing, but the surfaces themselves are selected by a governmental entity, in this case IDARTES or the Secretaría de Cultura.

Perhaps one of the most important conditions for the government´s selection is for these walls to be visible. Petro's administration sponsored murals in places where they could be easily seen. However, the underground walls of the Calle 26th rarely get any sort of institutional support. See what L, a graffiti writer that participated in the protest following the controversy of Justin Bieber, said when I asked him about this event:

-Ehh sí mi interesa muchísimo. Yo he tenido la oportunidad de hablar con el señor Gustavo Petro, el actual alcalde, cuando borraron los muros de la 26 que eran los

grafitis que estaban debajo no los que están *encima que están pagados por la institución*" (L, has an active role in the *Mesa Distrital del Graffiti*. My emphasis.)

Image 3.1: Tweet from the Gen. Palomino, who calls for a cleaner city with an "argument" reminiscent of the Broken Windows Theory.

When L mentions the graffiti that were erased, he is talking about a moment when the former mayor Petro was momentarily out of power. In a convoluted political process, Petro was temporarily impeached for alleged irregularities when attempting to implement a new system of trash collection. The President Juan Manuel Santos appointed Rafael Pardo as mayor, and one of the first actions that occurred during his administration was that policemen covered most of the walls of the 26th Street (See Image 3.1). L is talking about this event, but what is more interesting is that he is making a key distinction

between the urban art pieces that were erased and those that were left untouched. His interpretation is that there is a link between the location of the graffiti and the fact that they were erased. However, there were cases where the policemen erased some pieces that were above the street level, as an article in *El Tiempo* makes clear:

> Contrario a lo que muchos pensaron, las autoridades respetaron los murales que habían sido pintados y diseñados por cinco grupos de *expertos en arte urbano* (Street Art, M30, 20.26 DC, Vértigo Grafiti y Bicromo), quienes el año pasado adornaron los muros de la calle 26 entre la avenida Caracas y la NQS, convirtiendo a este corredor en toda una galería de arte callejero y un símbolo de la tolerancia (El Tiempo, 2014 my own emphasis)

L was correct in stating that the policemen erased certain pieces while leaving others untouched; however the truth is that the police officers tried to buff all the illegal pieces, not only those that were located in the underground sections of the 26th street. However, soon after this event, different sectors of Bogotá society (journalists, writers/artists, and members of the Petro administration) criticized the police intervention. The policemen had undertaken this "cleaning strategy" without consulting either Pardo (Redacción Blu Radio, 2014) nor the IDARTES. In fact, they were forced to apologize, as reported in an *El Espectador* headline: "Policía de Bogotá reconoció que se extralimitó en su labor borrando grafitis" (El Espectador, 2014b). Or as another article from the same newspaper article says:

> Las palabras del general no fueron bien recibidas en el Distrito. Clarisa Ruiz, secretaria de Cultura, le dijo a este diario que "la Alcaldía no coordinó nada de lo

> que está sucediendo con la Policía. De hecho, la Policía Metropolitana no es la directamente responsable, sino el general Palomino, pues fue él, al parecer, quien tomó esas decisiones. El Gobierno Nacional no puede darle órdenes a la Policía de Bogotá y dañar un proceso de concertación que estábamos llevando con grafiteros y policías[15] (Valenzuela, 2014)

Beyond the issue of who was responsible for covering up the 26th Street's street art and graffiti, I just want to highlight that this strategy is not very effective. Not long after the police had buffed the pieces on 26th Street the practitioners returned to hit the same spot that the police had erased. There is nothing more enticing than a blank canvas or wall for any artist, and yet some sectors of the city's government, in this particular case the police, do not seem to understand this fact. Let me quote from an art critic who on a blog post commented on this event:

> Pero ya fue, no hay que llorar por la pintura derramada, el transcurso del grafiti tiene sobre si ese riesgo, hoy se hace mañana no está, y a eso se somete cada artista urbano cuando toma un pedazo de la calle por fuera de una convocatoria legal, a que de un tajo se borre el trabajo hecho sin mayor pretexto. Mas todo está bien, que la noche caerá otra vez y las paredes por siempre no pueden vigilar, que la esperanza plagada de color está y aunque cien veces lo tapen, cien veces se pintará (Vélez, 2014)

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[15] Incidentally this quote clearly shows that the State is not a monolithic entity but that is fracture in diverse branches that do not necessarily coordinate amongst each other.

Image 3.2: Bombing in the 26th Street underpass.

When I conducted my fieldwork a couple of years after these events, the 26th street was still "bombed away". I noticed, however, that all the sanctioned murals were situated in prominent walls above ground whereas bombing, tags and other pieces defined as illegal under Decreto 75 were located underground (See Image 3.2). L, then, points out a crucial aspect of the second strategy deployed by the city's government. A key characteristic of institutional graffiti, i.e. murals, is that they are always visible and not as likely to be buffed by state agencies. Thus the best spots, i.e. large continuous walls, are allocated by state agencies to what the media and police officer refer to as "urban art

experts" (for an example see Image 3.3). The tactical responses to this strategy of the city government are more ambiguous and to a certain degree contradictory. Practitioners typically treat these murals as masterpieces and they are rarely bombed or tagged. Exceptions exist, of course: for example, white paint on murals is like a magnet for tags. But most murals remain untouched even though they are institutionalized forms of street art. Why is this the case? I argue that this is illustrative of one of the unspoken rules of the street: you never cover up some else's work, especially if it's a large piece.

One of the questions in my interview guide was, "what walls do you not touch?" My intuition was that private walls were out of the question. Sometimes graffiti writers confirmed my assumption, but the most common answer to this question is exemplified in the following excerpt:

- ¿Qué muros no toca?

- Yo respeto… digamos que un poco a raíz también de un aprendizaje que tuve por haberla hecho estúpidamente trato de no, no tapar cosas de otras personas.

- ¿Y qué la otra persona lo confrontó o algo así?

- Sí, claro. Hay todo un drama en el mundo del graffiti y la larga también hay una razón pues porque una persona que va e invierte su tiempo, sus materiales y su presupuesto en ir hacer algo, pero que llegue otro desconociendo eso y como que no lo tenga en cuenta y "pum". Como que es un irrespeto también. Entonces como que en medio de todo sí hay un motivo para disgustarse digamos. Ehhh digamos eso, creo que tiene que haber un respeto en cuanto eso y obviamente hay ciertas

permisividades, pues que hay muros que, no sé, si está pintados el 20% de abajo y lo vamos a coger todo, pues suerte

(M, studied Art in a private university)

M respects other artist's work because he learned this on the street. Less experienced artists or writers think that all walls are free game but this is certainly not the case, as he learned "por haberla hecho estupidamente". On the other hand, M has been a street artist for more than six years and with his crew he normally does very large unsanctioned pieces. Therefore, it is not surprising that he acknowledges both the fact that you should not cover up another urban artist's work but that a smaller piece may be covered up by a larger one (regardless if is state sanctioned or not).

This slightly contradictory stance makes sense once you understand that there is a hierarchy in the world of urban art. To pull off large murals or masterpieces requires a high degree of street experience. Therefore, I deploy Bourdieu's notion of culture capital in order to explain how this hierarchy works. In the following section I explore the concept of "street capital" as a way to understand how these tactics may at times be used in contradictory ways. Through an analysis of how experience is embodied in the graffiti writers and street artists as a form of cultural capital, we not only reach a deeper understanding of why certain murals tend to be respected, but also why the tactical response to the attempt to institutionalize graffiti/street art is so ambiguous and fragmented.

Image 3.3: One of the murals of the 26th Street by M30. Notice the tags on the bench.

STREET CAPITAL: HIERARCHIES OF STYLE

As any other form of cultural practice, urban art has division and hierarchies of its own. No matter what technique writers or artists choose, their most important asset is the time they have spent on the street. In all the interviews I conducted, *la calle* is not only the place for graffiti and street art but also a form of school. The following interview excerpts highlight this phenomenon:

> Pues inicialmente el graffiti para mí, inicialmente sólo era *salir a la calle* y hacer como las firmas, de mí grupo, mi firma. Salir a hacer algo diferente a lo que hacía

todo el mundo en ese entonces. Estoy hablando de hace como unos 15 años o así. (A, a prolific *bomber*)

Pero había siempre un miedo como de que no sé, no, no, un miedo a hacerlo, si pilla, que yo creo que eso le pasa a muchos. Simplemente, pero a la final uno cuando lo hace se da cuenta que ese miedo no existía porque es una bobada, es sólo *salir* a hacerlo y ya, eso es algo re-fácil.
(P, started as a writer but is currently experimenting with different techniques)

En ese sentido empecé a través de esas revistas ehhh y pues como casi todos los escritores con un poco de calle experimentando diferentes herramientas: entonces *como salir* a taggear con posterman, alguna tiza, alguna *crayola*, también entendiendo o sea es como cuando un quiere aprender a jugar un juego y está sin las instrucciones le toca a tientas ver cómo funciona, cómo se mueven los demás jugadores para saber cuál es la vaina, como es que hay que moverse, cuál es la jugada que hay que hacer, si. (D, works at a graffiti shop)

Writers and artists learn the tricks of the trade and the rules of the game by virtue of *salir a la calle*, i.e. going out the street. The more time writer and artists spend on the street, the more their techniques will improve and the more other practitioners will see their work. On the other hand, as they spend more time on the street they start

recognizing other people's works. L mentioned how he could map out the progress of some artists just by seeing the traces that they left on the city:

> "Esa redes están tejidas primero en la calle porque eran los chicos que nos conocimos no más el pseudónimo y sabíamos sin conocer la persona su rostro: "uyy este man ha avanzado un resto, ahhh este man está haciendo cosas buenas, mire como está el nivel de Bogotá"
> (L, began as a barrista but now considers him to be a self-taught artist)

Not only do artists and writers start recognizing each other's works, they can also track how they improve over time. In other words, the street becomes embodied in the artists and writers. And here is where I believe Bourdieu's notion of capital cultural may be useful to decipher the tactics that are deployed in the urban art world, since he argues that:

> Most of the properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that, in its fundamental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment. The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state, … presupposes a process of embodiment, incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor
> (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 83)

In the particular case of graffiti writing and street art, this embodiment stems from the time invested on *la calle*, which in turn produces what I call "street capital." I first became aware of how deeply embodied street capital is through my own lack of it. After a couple of weeks in the field, I became self-conscious of my own lack of handwriting style. I never learned how to apply the exact pressure to a spray can in order to not waste paint, let alone to produce a thin line. Even worse, it took me a long time to decipher the letters of some throw-ups and today I still struggle with "wildstyle" pieces. However, most of what I now know about graffiti and street art I learned by walking the streets, *saliendo a la calle* together with different practitioners.

N once took me out to tag along with her. When I finally gathered sufficient courage to do a tag, a security guard stopped me. Fortunately, she intervened and nothing untoward happened. Compare this situation to the following. At a different outing, we were walking in the historic section of Bogota known as the Candelaria. She was tagging with a special crayon, using a technique I was never able to master. As she was preparing to hit a sign post, a police car showed up and parked right in front of us. I was petrified and started to walk nervously past the police officers when I noticed that N had not followed me. I turned around and saw her jump on top of a bollard and casually tag the sign post. Therefore, not only was I incapable of using a specific tool, the crayon, but I was too afraid even to be at her side when she was in the process doing tag. In my interview with her N said the following of the street:

No es que igual la calle … la calle, es ruda marica [used here similarly as "dude"]. Y sí, obviamente de una u otra manera pues se va haciendo tu personalidad con la

calle y pues el parche [the gang] que tu conoces también es re-callejero. Y la jerga [jargon] o sea uno termina por más gomelo [posh] que sea el que está en la calle termina hablando ñero y con un resto de mañas [tricks]. Pero es porque la calle también lo pide: que tú estés aleta [alert]

(N, *grafitera* and the person who taught me how to properly use scissors)

The street made N *ruda* (tough). She is arguing that her own experience in the street has made her talk in a particular way, that she became more alert of her surroundings, and that she learned a lot of tricks. Not only do they have to be mindful of their surroundings while doing illegal pieces but they also start seeing, talking, and walking in a particular way.

N's lived experience and her words points to another important aspect of street capital: it is not only embodied in the writers and artists but is also expressed through their work on the streets, which will in turn provide the graffiti writer or street artists more recognition within the urban art scene. Street capital is not only embodied in specific actors but also is reflected through their work on the street.

That is to say, according to Bourdieu (2010) cultural capital can become "objectified" into cultural goods: artists create paintings, musicians' songs, etc. Therefore, other people who might not have the embodied cultural capital can appropriate cultural goods materially through economical capital (e.g. by buying art) or symbolically (e.g. by going to a museum). To a lesser degree, this too happens with street art and graffiti. Yes, urban art can be commoditized: there are galleries that specialize in selling urban art (the two most prominent are Vertigo Graffiti and Dibs), shops that cater to the

needs of the practitioners, and several city institutions in Bogotá that have commissioned artists to do murals (as the 26th Street clearly illustrates)[16]. However, the objectification of street art and graffiti writing occurs primarily in public space. Regardless if it is a state financed mural or an illegal tag, urban art becomes a cultural good on the street where anyone can see it. See for example what D had to say about graffiti writing:

> Es más, yo siento que es más un juego de la calle de niños que terminó convirtiendo en un fenómeno social sin ninguna pretensión ni cultural, ni artística, ni política, ni nada de ese tipo de cosas. Si no que simplemente era, o como hasta yo lo entendí, es como el hecho de apropiarse de los espacios de la calle, espacios visibles, espacios contundentes.
>
> (D, sold to me my first spray can)

Ultimately, graffiti writers and street artists get to be known in the street. That is to say that their street capital is acquired by having *espacios visibles, espacios contundentes* ("visible spots, forceful spaces"). No matter if you do state sponsored murals or sell your works in art galleries, the street is where practioners carved out their name and that is where their value ultimate resides.

Now, I hope, it is becoming clearer why I needed to first talk about street capital: both urban street practitioners and state agencies that sponsor murals are vying for the best spots. This could be clearly seen in the 26th Street, where the outcome of this unequal

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16 Toxicómano, Erre y Lesivo, three "urban art experts" according to the webpage of Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia did a portrayed of Antonio Nariño, a leader of the independence movement in Nueva Granada. See: http://www.bibliotecanacional.gov.co/content/un-antonio-nari%C3%B1o-recargado-se-toma-la-biblioteca-nacional

game was that only works done by "street art experts" were protected by the state (El Tiempo, 2014)

This issue brings me to Bourdieu's final characteristic of cultural capital and the biggest point of departure from street capital: it can be institutionalized. For Bourdieu, schools are the systems that institutionalize cultural capital: "The objectification of cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications is one way of neutralizing some of the properties it derives from the fact that, being embodied, it has the same biological limits as its bearer" (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 85). However, street capital is "institutionalized" not exactly through qualifications but rather by actual economic capital: state agencies, like IDARTES, or private galleries, actually provide resources for graffiti writers and street artists. However, the street has its own rules that may go against the push for a "responsible and artistic graffiti" (Decreto 75).

Purists argue that that graffiti can only be called as such if it is done illegally. But do not take my word for this: "{-}" and Stinkfish, founder of APC, one of the largest crews in Colombia, said about this effort to institutionalize urban art:

> "Nada más falso, nada más irreal, el graffiti no es una práctica artística y la manera más responsable de hacerlo es lejos de las instituciones, de los decretos, de los patrocinios, premios y convocatorias"
>
> (Stinkfish & {-}, 2014)

The "kings" and "queens," those that arguably have the most street capital, will advocate illegal urban art precisely because they created their name in an era when street art and graffiti was clearly illegal. Ironically, Stinkfish and {-} were criticized within the

urban art scene because they managed to live off this practice by "selling" their image. In the comment sections of this blog a user named Santiago said the following:

> "Es muy difícil y muy ingenuo comerse el discurso del grafiti ilegal, transgresor, vándalo, real, anarquista, que no se vende, que no come de patrocinios, ni convocatorias, que se escapa de cualquier entendimiento, cuando quien escribe esto es alguien que vende sus imágenes que construyó haciendo grafiti"
>
> (Stinkfish & {-}, 2014)

Thus, other practitioners may feel that the radical position advocated in this blog entry was only made possible because its authors, two accomplished writers, have managed to live off street art and graffiti. Street capital cannot be easily converted to economical capital and sometimes the latter can even be detrimental to the former.

Beyond this particular controversy, what I am trying to show is that different actors within the field of urban art will take different positions according to their street capital. This becomes clear when in blogs, Facebook posts, or other social media, different writers and street artists debate amongst each other about the virtues or vices of institutionalizing urban art. So, for example, a street artist like Toxicómano, who alongside his crew Bogotá Street Art completed a massive mural on Avenida del Dorado (See Image 8 in the Introduction), acknowledges that the illegal nature of street art and graffiti is part of its appeal (See Image 3.4). In this particular example he frames vandalism as essential to graffiti and street art, even though he was worked for the city government.

Practitioners that do murals sponsored by state agencies will tend to defend their work, but —and this is where contradictions arise—most of them will also celebrate the illegal and transgressive nature of street art and graffiti. That is, they might cooperate with the state but they also fight back to avoid being co-opted by it. Like I suggested previously, street capital can never be earned outside its natural environment: the street. Street artists or graffiti writers who do murals will inevitably return to unsanctioned forms of art. That is how they acquired their street capital and that is how their art has been has been objectified in pieces, stencils, tags, stickers, and so on.

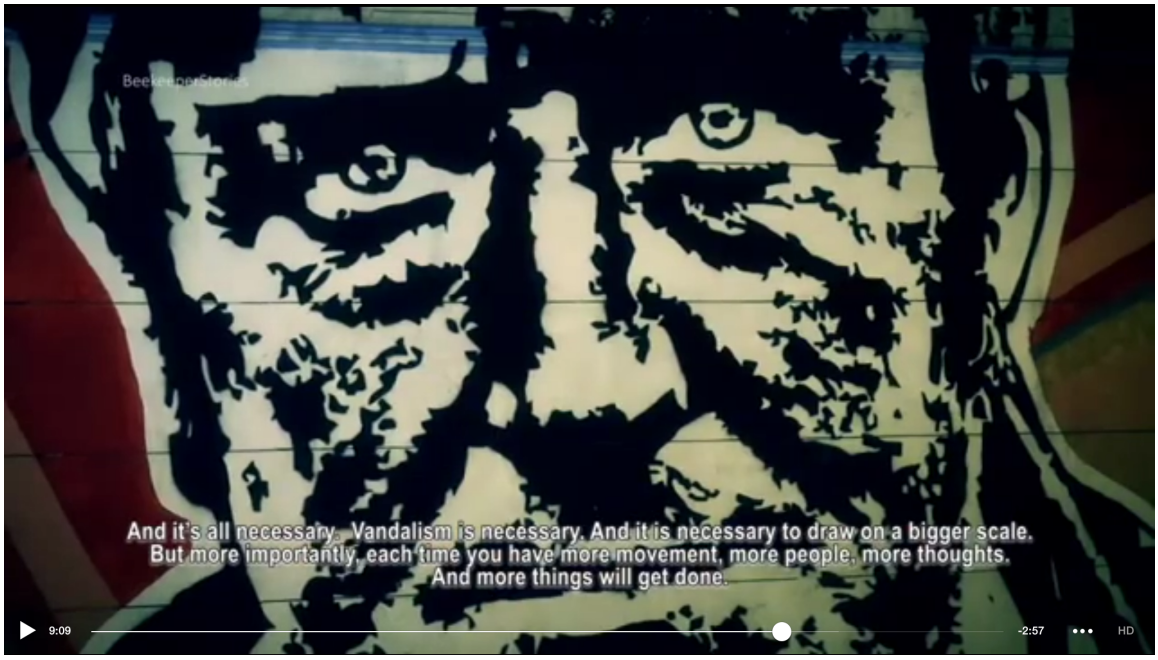

Image 3.4: Still frame taken from Documentary - Graffiti artist Toxicomano. Street Art Bogota, Colombia done by Beekeeperstories. World travel. Documentary: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTt78qZIgR4

Another way to think about the Decreto 75, then, is that it changed the rules of the game. Some of the most experienced writers I talked with complained about this issue: "toys" (inexperienced writers) all of a sudden had access to large walls and they deemed their pieces as mediocre at best. Meanwhile, older writers had to deal with harsher conditions when their skill was profoundly linked with the speed with which they could accomplish a throw-up. Graffiti was dying of attrition. The art was losing its illegal edge while the best writers were doing "legal walls".

Yet not all murals or legal walls are safe. Talking about one of her first works, B, a muralist, told me the following story:

- Y comenzamos a trabajar y la primera vez que nos ganamos una convocatoria de IDARTES…Para pintar en la Suba [an Avenue], que fue un mural que duró un día, porque se lo cagaron [they ruin it].

- ¿Quién se lo cagó?

- No sé, no sabemos, pero se lo tiraron muy vasto

- ¿Pero con tags?

- Si total, era un mural de una campaña de sensibilización con... acerca del VIH y no, no duró nada, fue muy deprimente.

-O sea, en Suba la movida es demasiado fuerte como para..

Sí, … como que ya está demasiado establecida, ¿no? Como que no habían hablado los de IDARTES con el parche ni nada entonces pues como que suerte.

(B, after being thrown to jail for tagging decided only to do "legal" walls)

Murals sponsored by IDARTES or other state agencies are not entirely immune to the rules of the street. Graffiti writers and street artists will still reclaim the spots that were covered by murals, as B sadly found out.

I also learned this same lesson from the other side of the coin. A, he told me about a spot on 26th Street. He had cleaned the wall and done a *wild-style* piece. However, it only lasted for a few days since a political organization had covered up his work with a mural.

> Y luego con un amigo que se llama ____, de Soacha, pinté hace un mes allí en la 26. Un día así normal. Sin evento ni nada, sino por cuenta propia. Entonces me tomé como un día con él, limpiando el muro, raspándolo, y pintamos y tal. Y a los dos días unos manes, pues los de la UP [Unión Patriótica, a leftist political party] nos taparon el muro así chan. Entonces pues voy a volver a recuperarlo, porque ese sí es un spot mío de graffiti. Lo cogí, lo pulí, todo y estos manes ["these dudes"] aprovecharon y me lo taparon.
>
> (A, I have one of his sticker on my laptop)

Cleaning a wall for large piece takes a lot of time in addition to the week or two required completing the masterpiece. For this reason artists and writers tend to respect the masterpieces or murals of other practitioners if they see them as peers, or if they have roughly the same street capital. Therefore, if an outsider from the scene simple paints over the work of known practioners, he or she will typically reclaim it, just like A said he would ("entonces, pues, voy a recuperarlo). The only way a new mural might be safe is if it is bigger than the original piece, this way the creators of the former will not hit the

latter. (See Images 3.5 and 3.6). Obviously, the rules in this game are fluid and they can be broken. Perhaps in the future the murals of 26th street will be covered by something new. Urban art is constantly changing and practitioners have come to terms with the ephemeral nature of their works.

Image 3.5: Still frame taken from a video posted by Dexs, a graffiti writer who is also member of INK Crew. The photo shows how the artists are prepping the wall. See: https://www.facebook.com/dexs1/videos/878632915592705/?pnref=story

Image 3.6: Both the video and the title are named after one of the nicknames of this major Avenue El Dorado. This mural covers two walls of 26th Street, each one of more 120 meters long.

In a sense, the rules under Decreto 75 were informed by attitudes from a period when street art and graffiti where both illegal: a time when policemen would vigorously and violently deal with these "vandals". However, Jeff Ferrell in his ethnographic research *Crimes of Style* (1996) compellingly argues that graffiti is confronted by a fascinating paradox: as "moral entrepreneurs" (politicians, policemen, judges and journalists) try to criminalize and eradicate any form of illegal urban art, this only gives practitioners more reasons to invest their time and economic resources in creating larger and more daring pieces. Thus graffiti has been discursively constructed as an illegal activity by moral entrepreneurs but also by the practitioners themselves. Consequently, any efforts to eradicate and criminalize it only accentuate its conditions of possibility.

Petro's off-hand approach has created a new but equally irksome paradox: by allowing graffiti and street art to proliferate, strategies like the Mesa Distrital and the Decreto 75 are actually profoundly altering the urban art scene. In D's words:

> "Volviendo a lo de la 26 esto es como una .. un hecho real de que el Estado con sus obras de movilidad deja espacios baldíos tan gigantescos no los puede dejar así de grises porque la ciudad se va a ver súper aburrido y se va a prestar para el abandono. Entonces pues chévere [cool] que de algún modo los manes quieran embellecer los espacios, severo [rad], pero no se han dado cuenta los mismos escritores que su cultura o su escena de la cual tanto hablan tiene un peso más, más fuerte o digamos más concreto en todo lo que le hace el estado por ellos que lo que ellos realmente hacen por su escena, sí?"
>
> (D, bomber and graffiti entrepreneur)

Despite D's critical view of Bogotá's urban art scene, it is a strong one, making Colombia's capital an international referent of urban art (Wulfhart, 2015; Zapata, 2016). Street artists and graffiti writers are actually starting to make a living of what used to be considered a juvenile and criminal activity. Let me briefly explain how they accomplish this in the following section.

LIVING OFF THEIR ART AND CHANGING THE STREETS: INFORMAL ECONOMIES AND NETWORKS OF LEARNING

As a form of conclusion let me briefly go beyond the scale of the 26th street to mention one aspect of graffiti writing and street art that could point towards a different

form of urban planning: the fact that it is a collective enterprise. I remember when I attended a solo show of a famous writer at a gallery dedicated to street art. Before introducing the artist, one of the directors of the gallery, a street artist himself, said of it that it was "un espacio por y para grafiteros". And yes, it is still true what N told me: "The bigger the wall, the bigger the ego". However, most of the largest walls tend to be done collectively. And there is no doubt that some of the street art collectives or graffiti writing crews benefit from the in-group dynamics backed up by the bureaucracy of the city government. But these writers and artists also have a "do it yourself mentality": they self-organize events and invite other artists to participate, sell hand-made products using their image (stickers of their bombings, jewelry, patches for clothes, t-shirts or do small paintings with the techniques of street art and graffiti).

This self-organization also facilitates the transmission of knowledge. Street artists, graffiti writers and muralists may all cohabit a single space, be this a house that is scheduled to be demolished, an underground parking lot (see image 6), or a red light district neighborhood (see image 7) or other "unsafe" spaces that are being re-fashioned through place making (Pabón, 2015). By cohabiting in the same space, they are able to watch each other work and exchange different techniques and then use them when creating works of art (uncommissioned or otherwise) on the street.

This knowledge also allows graffiti writers and street artists to react against the economic pressures of today's capitalist society. For example, as A was developing as a graffiti writer he also had to consider developing ways to provide for his family. He now sells stickers and paints murals for different companies:

Porque en esta esa polémica de que "uyyy no pero ud, ehh, vende el graffiti o devenga del graffiti" y yo digo pues yo lo hago *porque respondo en la calle* en ese tipo de cosas. Y sí, digamos, pues laboralmente práctico con el graffiti, chan, chan, y estoy usando aerosol y practicando con la herramienta, para en la calle también ser bueno. (A, saw him paint a massive piece with the help of his son)

Even though other practitioners might consider him a sell-out because he makes money selling paintings and stickers, he told me that he has a graffiti writer's heart. This means that on occasion he feels the need to "hacer unas bombitas" (go out to the street to do illegal throw-ups).

Ultimately, practitioners like A with their street capital and knowledge created a city saturated by street art (Morrison, 2014), where 26th Street can be considered a museum for all sorts of urban art. Bogotá is now talked about in the international media as the new capital of street art and graffiti in Latin America and as a laboratory for innovative ways to deal with this "urban crisis". Bogota has become a place that can teach other cities that repression is not an effective strategy to deal with this phenomenon. This development, in turn, has forced politicians and other moral entrepreneurs in Bogota to take this cultural practice seriously to better understand the role of street art in forming new urban imaginaries in the city. Their tactics continually force politicians and moral entrepreneurs to reformulate their strategies of control[17], which in turn will be swiftly opposed by new tactics.

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17 Even though it falls outside of the scope of this thesis it is important to note that the new mayor of Bogotá, Enrique Peñaloza, does not have the same opinion as Gustavo Petro. However,

As a result, graffiti writers and street artists are changing Bogotá's cityscape in novel ways. Their actions may not change the socio-economic disparities so present in the city but at least they are providing a free piece of art for anyone to watch: from a bicyclist during Bogotá's now famous ciclovías, to a distracted passenger of Transmilenio, to someone stuck in the infamous traffic jams of the city.

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even his *secretario de gobierno* recently tweeted: "Se respetarán grafitis artísticos en zonas autorizada". See: https://twitter.com/migueluribet/status/684374393640882176

Conclusion

As I was starting to write this thesis, Professor Fernando Lara, one of my advisors, sent me an article by The Guardian titled "Can Bogotá's state-sanctioned street art survive a crackdown by the new mayor?" (Finn, 2016). In it Adharan Finn wrote:

> The relative freedom Bogotá's street artists have become accustomed to, however, may be about to change. After 12 years of leftwing leaders, in January the city re-elected a centre-right mayor from the late 1990s, Enrique Peñalosa, who comes down on the side of those who believe the uncontrolled spread of graffiti is a blight on the city (Finn, 2016).

The article itself did not shock me. I had being following the electorate process for Colombia's second most important public office and I knew the incumbent mayor, Enrique Peñalosa, would revise and even reverse a lot of the progressive measures of his predecessor. This clearly included the Decreto 75 and the flexible legal framework regulating urban art. What did surprise was that no one in my social media accounts had commented or posted this article. Was it possible that no one had picked up on it? Hours later *El Espectador* published an article mentioning Finn's piece (El Espectador, 2016) and then, all of the sudden, my Facebook feed was abuzz with this subject. Like most trending topics on social media the frenzy did not last long, but for a couple of days I had the opportunity to witness some of the street artists, graffiti writers and muralists who I had met discussing the merits and limitations of Gustavo Petro's approach towards urban art. It was a unique experience since a lot of the arguments I have put forward in this thesis were being formulated in different, less academic and more common language in

front of my own eyes and in real time. I was witnessing a debate that matters to a lot of people.

To the extent of my knowledge, mine is the first in-depth analysis of this particular period in Bogotá. During four years artists and writers could roam the city relatively free and fill it with what they considered to be art. Lawmakers strived to go beyond the usual repressive laws and policemen stopped harassing people who ultimately were not harming anyone. In turn, by analyzing one particular street I sought to showcase both the limits and virtues of this strategy. Massive murals started decorating what used to be simple gray walls facing the Calle 26, throw-ups sprung in its underpasses and tags flourished on the buildings adjacent to this major avenue. In more theoretical terms I could say urban imaginaries proliferated in the Avenida del Dorado in part because of the tactics deployed by graffiti writers and street artists. As a result of this tension between the strategies of the state and the tactics of street artists, 26th Street turned into a de facto open air urban art gallery and Bogotá became known as the Latin American mecca of street art and graffiti. Even right-wing politicians started talking about the virtues of "artistic and responsible" graffiti. This study is timely since it explores a specific street during a unique historical juncture where, one could say, an urban experiment was carried out: graffiti and street art would no longer be criminalized.

In my very first class here at the University of Texas I read the canonical *Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning* where Rittel and Webber (1973) argue that urban planning, as opposed to other disciplines, faces wicked problems. The classical definition of "wicked problems" holds that these are essentially unique, difficult to even formulate

and that their solution will greatly depend on the way they are framed. Consequently, there is no way of knowing beforehand if a given design will solve such problems or not, and any solution will not be judged as true or false (like in a math problem) but rather in good (enough) or bad terms. Even worse, architects, designers and planners who face any wicked problem do not have the luxury to be wrong because they will invariably be held accountable for their decisions (Rittel & Webber, 1973). This is to say that planners rarely have the opportunity to conduct experiments to test their hypothesis.

Yet the Decreto 75 and the Mesa Distrital del Graffiti can all be understood as an urban experiment that sought to frame the "problem" of graffiti and street art differently. Was this strategy successful? I honestly do not know. It is almost impossible to make a strong argument either way because the new major is already undoing what was accomplished during Gustavo Petro's administration. The outcome of any urban process or city policy takes a long time to adequately assess, and the Decreto 75 has only been in place for a few years. Bogotá will now deal with graffiti and street art in the usual way: erasing the unsanctioned works of art and persecuting their creators. Having said this, the current study not only expands the scholarly understanding of a ubiquitous urban phenomenon, but it also allows city officials and planners the opportunity to see that a different approach is possible and even desirable.

Beyond any aesthetic criteria of the work they do I am amazed by the amount of time and resources street artists, graffiti writers, and muralists devote in order to provide Bogotá with free works of art. The tactics they deploy may be contradictory at times but ultimately these are people who conceptualize and occupy their city in a radically

different way from official planning. Following Marcelo Souza, it is not too far-fetched to conceive of graffiti writers and street artists as critical urban planners since they too

> …have to *plan alternatives*, they cannot be restricted to criticism and demands towards the state. They must be able to *offer proposals* and *conceive concrete alternatives*—and, to some extent, to *realize* them *despite* the state apparatus and (at the end of the day, and not only when they face a particularly conservative government) *against* the state (Souza, 2006, pp. 328 – 329)

In this particular case I think graffiti writers and street artists are offering Bogotá and other cities concrete alternatives for a different public space. Their actions may only alter the surface of the urban space but I believe their collective actions points towards a different way to conceive and create our cities. Hopefully, this study will convince urban planners that they can learn how to work with, and not against, street artists and graffiti writers. However, we must begin to understand this cultural phenomenon as more than just a juvenile and criminal activity. In other words, we have to seriously take the point of view of these cultural practitioners who make a living out of walking their streets and who try, as much as they can, to shape the city that is shaping them.

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